NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

CULTIVATING THE GRAPEVINE: AN ANALYSIS OF RUMOR PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

by

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December 2015

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			*Form Approved OMB No. 0704–0188*
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202–4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704–0188) Washington DC 20503.			
1. AGENCY USE ONLY ***(Leave blank)***	**2. REPORT DATE** December 2015	**3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED** Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE CULTIVATING THE GRAPEVINE: AN ANALYSIS OF RUMOR PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS			**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**
6. AUTHOR(S) Jamie O. Nasi and Jacob Sweatland			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943–5000			**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			**10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB Protocol number ____N/A____.			
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE**

13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

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The purpose of this study is to analyze the principles and concepts governing the spread of rumors for their future integration into Psychological Operations forces (PSYOP) doctrine and training. Specifically, this study draws from a review of current and historical literature on rumor theory to distill a set of principles to guide the successful employment of rumors, as well as a set of principles for defending against the employment of rumors by an adversary. These principles are then tested by the case study analysis of three examples of successful rumor generation, as well as two successful examples and one unsuccessful case of rumor defense. From its investigation, this study proposes two new models to assist the influence practitioner in the employment of and defense against rumors.

14. SUBJECT TERMS PSYOP, rumors, doctrine, influence			**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 111
			16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE** Unclassified	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT** Unclassified	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT** UU

NSN 7540–01–280–5500 Standard Form 298 (Rev. 2–89)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. 239–18

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INFORMATION STRATEGY AND POLITICAL WARFARE

from the

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
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ABSTRACT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IRA	Internet Research Agency
J2	Intelligence
J3	Operational Planning
J39	Information Operations
J5	Future Operational Planning
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
MILDEC	military deception
MNF-I	Multi-National Force-Iraq
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
PAO	Public Affairs Office
PSYOP	psychological operations
RAF	Royal Air Force
RDP	rumor defense process
REC	rumor employment cycle
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UPC	Underground Propaganda Committee

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Dr. Heather Gregg, the primary advisor of this study, for her mentorship and dedication to the effort. The authors thank the second reader, Dr. Dayne Nix, for his meticulous review of drafted chapters. Special thanks are also given to COL Ian Rice for his help in generating the topic, and to Dr. Camber Warren for helping to develop the structure of this study. Finally, the authors would like to thank the staff of the Dudley Knox Library, whose tireless dedication to the students of the Naval Postgraduate School make studies, such as this one, possible.

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I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

A. BACKGROUND

At some point in their lives, all Americans have heard, spread, or been the subject of a rumor. Most rumors are relatively benign, providing titillating topics of conversation for social groups. However, other rumors have caused significant damage, such as a rumor about a white police officer's murder of a young minority that sparked the 1935 Harlem Race Riot, resulting in the destruction of millions of dollars' worth of property, three deaths, and hundreds of injuries.[1] Depending on the topic and their method of circulation, rumors can be a powerful tool for mobilizing people and shaping behavior.

In today's anxiety-laden security environment, rumors can provide unique insights into the current grievances and fears of a given population; they can also act as powerful agents of influence. For example, by propagating rumors about civilian abuses at the hands of the government or military, an adversary can foster a sense of uncertainty and sow distrust between a government and its population. Conversely, by evaluating and understanding rumors currently circulating through a population, a government or military force can overcome obstacles to its programs, and can provide targeted messages of reassurance to the populace when necessary. Given the importance of rumors in today's security environment, who in the United States (U.S.) military is charged with wielding rumors as an influence tool and for countering their negative effects?

This thesis aims to investigate a missing dimension of U.S. military information operations in the post-September 11 security environment: the opportunities and threats posed by rumors. This study explores rumor theory from a military perspective, including how it applies to the recognition, implementation, and countering of rumors. Specifically, this study examines the characteristics of successfully propagated rumors, and how organizations have dealt with rumors employed against them.

[1] "False Rumors of a Black Puerto Rican Boy's Death Sparks the Harlem Riot of 1935," March 18, 2015, http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/rumors-black-boy-death-sparks-harlem-riot-1935-article-1.2145887.

Psychologist Ralph Rosnow defines rumor as unverified information, relevant to the group of persons involved in its dissemination, which thrives when there is ambiguity and uncertainty.[2] As Bordia and Difonzo assert, rumor is a form of interpersonal communication, within a group, which is intended to "reduce anxiety via a process of social sense-making."[3] What separates news from rumor is that news is substantiated information emanating from an authoritative source. What separates gossip from rumor is that gossip is considered idle talk, which is important to a limited few, and maintains little significance beyond those with whom it originates.[4]

Rumors are significant because of their ability to influence populations directly. A rumor can act as a perfect tool to subvert, deceive, and to suggest what truth is. Rumors have the greatest impact when "truth becomes less about facts and evidence and more about coherence with pre-existing and prevailing understandings."[5] When a well-crafted rumor is disseminated via a clandestine source, the rumor can quickly spread and can have lasting effect on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of a given target audience.[6]

B. METHODOLOGY

This thesis investigates literature and historic military doctrine on the subject of rumors. From this investigation, it posits that five criteria must be satisfied for the successful propagation of rumors (plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness), and that six criteria must be adhered to in the defense against rumors (reduce anxiety and uncertainty, limit means of dissemination, ignore impotent rumors, comment on plausible rumors, confirm the truth, refute effectively). From these criteria,

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[2] Ralph L. Rosnow, "Psychology of Rumor Reconsidered," *Psychological Bulletin* 87, no. 3 (1980): 578–591.

[3] Prashant Bordia and Nicholas Difonzo, "Problem Solving in Social Interactions on the Internet: Rumor as a Contagion," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2004): 33.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Daniel Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism, and the Struggle for Strategic Influence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 3, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10593846.

[6] "General Ludendorff is quoted as saying that rumor is the most dangerous means of propaganda precisely because beliefs are planted from sources that cannot be traced." Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 190.

this thesis conducts an in-depth analysis of five case studies, in which rumors were successfully employed, either offensively or as counter measures, and one case study where rumors were unsuccessfully managed. The selected cases are drawn from different regions of the world over a span of 70 years and include examples of rumors in times of war, as well as in peace.

The selected cases are grouped into two sets, one that looks at the employment of rumors and the other that looks at countering rumors. The first set of successful rumor propagation includes a rumor that the British could set the English Channel on fire during World War II to thwart German attempts at invasion; a rumor which claimed the September 11 attacks were a Zionist plot; and a rumor that discredited terrorist leader Noordin Top after his death. The second set on countering rumors includes the defense against a rumor that inflated the effects of polio on Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) during his 1932 campaign for the American presidency; the successful defense of a rumor that instigated a boycott against the retailer Carrefour in China in 2008; and rumors during Operation Iraqi Freedom that claimed American forces were attempting to starve the Iraqi population into submission by killing livestock and destroying crops. These cases include historical examples of rumor propagation, as well as two contemporary cases, to consider how technology has changed the spread and counter of rumors. Furthermore, each set contains both Western and non-Western examples, as well as military and non-military examples of rumors, to allow for a breadth of cultural contexts.

From this investigation, the thesis develops two unique models for employing or defending against rumors. The first model, the Rumor Employment Cycle (REC) is designed for rumor employment; specifically, it is a planning tool that can help influence practitioners in crafting, synchronizing, spreading, and evaluating rumors. The second model, Rumor Defense Process (RDP) is designed for rumor defense, which incorporates and expands upon concepts drawn from literature on defeating rumors to help coordinate the prevention and neutralization of rumors by a military staff.

C. FINDINGS

The studied cases yield the following findings. First, rumors are a powerful form of influence, which can be leveraged against individuals, groups, and networks. Specifically, the following criteria are required for rumor effectiveness: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness. Second, with regard to countering rumors, a mixture of proactive and reactive measures is needed, including reducing environmental anxiety and uncertainty, as well as limiting the means of rumor dissemination. Reactive measures include ignoring impotent rumors, commenting on plausible rumors, confirming the truth, and refuting rumors effectively. Additionally, such measures must be enacted at the first available opportunity since rumors over time begin to be perceived as facts, thus, making it harder to dislodge them from the population's psyche.

Based on these findings and review of literature, the thesis recommends that the current gap in U.S. influence doctrine may be addressed by incorporating the two models developed in the thesis that govern rumor propagation and defense, the REC and RDP, respectively. This inclusion will help provide soldiers with a functional knowledge of how to recognize, implement, and counter rumors effectively in today's operational environment.

D. OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

This study proceeds in Chapter II with a review of historical and current literature on the subject of rumors. First, Chapter II provides a base knowledge of rumor theory by assessing significant publications in both academic and historic military doctrine. Next, the chapter describes different types of influence operations and influence techniques in their relation to rumors. Then, by synthesizing previous studies on the subject of rumor, the chapter proposes two sets of principles guiding the effective propagation and defense against rumors. The first set of principles covers the propagation of rumors, which observe that successful rumors are characteristically uncomplicated and easy to remember; they are based on the current interests and circumstances of their audience; they exploit emotions and sentiments, and they follow historical precedents. The chapter

asserts that successfully propagating rumors requires the satisfaction of five criteria: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and—in some cases—suggestiveness. The second set of principles covers the defense against rumors, which observes that a successful defense requires adherence to the following guidelines: being prepared to deal with rumors, taking prompt action once rumors emerge, staying on message when refuting rumors, controlling the narrative, minimizing misunderstanding when refuting rumors, and taking responsibility for the truthful elements of any rumor. Under the guidelines for defense, two sets of criteria are given for preventing and neutralizing rumors. Preventing rumors requires reducing environmental anxiety and ambiguity, while limiting an adversary's means to disseminate rumors. Neutralizing rumors requires ignoring those that are impotent, commenting on those that are plausible, confirming the truth, and refuting falsehoods effectively. This chapter closes with a discussion on the implications of technology for the reach and impact of a rumor.

Chapter III analyzes three cases of successful rumor employment: the British incendiary anti-invasion weapon rumor, the Zionist pre-warning and involvement in 9/11 rumor, and the rumor tarnishing Noordin Top's legacy as a terrorist leader. The analysis of these cases supports the validation of all five criteria of rumor employment, with all of the criteria being satisfied in each case. Furthermore, where the proposed criteria are not satisfied, or where the criteria conflict with one another, a rumor will not become self-propelling or will become unrecognizably distorted from its original form, thus failing to propagate effectively and influence the intended audience.

Chapter IV considers three cases in which rumors were both successfully and unsuccessfully countered: negating rumors of FDR's poor health, refuting rumors of the French retailer Carrefour's support to Tibet, and the failure to counter rumors hindering reconstruction efforts in Iraq. The analysis of these cases demonstrates the need for an organization to conduct methodical scanning of the information environment for conditions favoring rumor generation; to act transparently, ethically, and responsibly in public; and to eliminate known sources of rumor by restricting mediums or channels through which rumors propagate. Furthermore, the case studies reveal the importance of

considering rumors from the perspective of the target audience, and taking seriously rumors that are plausible to the target audience.

Chapter V begins by emphasizing the principles of rumor employment and defense to be incorporated into the future doctrine and training of Psychological Operations forces (PSYOP). The study concludes with the proposal of two new models based on the case study findings, conclusions drawn after assessing the academic literature on the subject of rumors, and the review and recognition of a gap in current U.S. military doctrine. These models—the REC and the RDP—are designed to help assist the influence practitioner with the employment of, and defense against, rumors in the modern security environment.

II. PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS OF RUMOR THEORY FOR MILITARY APPLICATION

A. INTRODUCTION

Incorporating rumors into future U.S. military doctrine and training requires, first, a review of historical and current literature on the subject. Therefore, this chapter begins by deriving a base of knowledge of rumor theory from significant publications in both academic literature and historic military doctrine. This chapter also describes two sets of principles that explain how rumors are effectively employed and how to defend against them. Finally, this chapter closes with a discussion on the implications of technology, specifically how it affects rumor propagation and effectiveness.

B. RUMORS AND RUMOR PROPAGATION

The first publication of significance regarding rumor theory was made by Robert H. Knapp with his 1944 study, *A Psychology of Rumor*.[7] Knapp wrote about the environmental conditions that foster rumors. He also classified rumors into categories based on their purpose: the wish rumor, expressing the hopes of the target audience; the bogie rumor, expressing the fears and anxieties of the target audience; and the aggression rumor, which is motivated by aggression or hatred, and is directed against members of one's own population.[8] Modern theorists did not retain Knapp's system of categorization, but they have agreed with Knapp's two basic suppositions that rumors provide populations with unverified information, and that they satisfy "some emotional need"[9] for those who circulate the information.

Around the same time as Knapp, Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman established themselves as the most historically relevant theorists regarding rumor. In *The Psychology of Rumor* (1947), Allport and Postman capture the fundamental tenets of rumor theory.[10]

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[7] Robert H. Knapp, "A Psychology of Rumor," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 8, (1944): 22–37.

[8] Ibid., 27.

[9] Ibid., 23.

[10] Gordon W. Allport and Leo Joseph Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965).

They posit what became known as the basic law of rumor, $R \sim i \times a$, where the intensity of rumor spread (R) is proportional to the importance of the rumor to the individual (i) times the ambiguity surrounding the event (a).[11] Furthermore, a rumor is more infectious in times of uncertainty, when little information is being released through authoritative channels, and when the unofficial information in circulation is of significance to the population in which it is circulated.[12] Other theorists support the notion that crafting and transmitting rumors help people cope with the unknown and that "the more perplexing the situation, the more urgent will be [the] need to impose credible meaning and organization in order to guide our behavior in the uncertain future."[13]

Allport and Postman were also the first theorists to study the transmission of rumors in a controlled setting. Their study provided insight to three aspects of information distortion within rumor propagation: leveling—as information travels it,

> tends to grow shorter, more concise, more easily grasped and told" for ease of transmission; sharpening—individuals selectively choose what points they want to emphasize to ensure the message is enticing enough to survive; and assimilation—the individual receiving the information will do so only if it conforms to their previously established "emotions, attitudes, and prejudices.[14]

Most modern theorists rebut the clinical findings of Allport and Postman by noting that, outside of a controlled environment, rumors are a social phenomenon that spreads throughout groups of like-minded individuals until the rumor is dismissed after being proven untrue by the group through a process of testing and clarification. For example, Caplow argues that, within a group,

> a rumor is usually heard more than once and usually transmitted more than once by each individual, and this re-circulation tends to eliminate variation and if circumstances allow sufficient time, the final form of a rumor for a

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[11] Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, "An Analysis of Rumor," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 10, (1947): 502.

[12] Stanley Schachter and Harvey Burdick, "A Field Experiment on Rumor Transmission and Distortion," *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology* 50, no. 3 (May 1955): 368.

[13] Ralph P. Rosnow, "Inside Rumor: A Personal Journey," *American Psychologist* 46, no. 5 (1991): 488.

[14] Allport and Postman, "An Analysis of Rumor," 505.

> sizeable percentage of the group may be a statement in prescribed form with a high degree of consensus on every word.[15]

This process of clarifying and assimilating a rumor within a group has most recently been argued in 2004 by Prashant Bordia and Nicholas Difonzo.[16] Bordia and Difonzo proposed a four-stage process of rumor propagation through a group, likening it to a conversation with an "exchange of ideas, opinions, and viewpoints," where "people attempt to persuade others to believe or disbelieve the rumor by providing confirming or disconfirming information, often backed by personal experiences."[17]

Historically, theorists had agreed that the distinct mode of rumor transmission was carried out through face-to-face conversations, which increased accountability and criticality with regard to processing new information.[18] The advent of the Internet has challenged earlier hypotheses about the transmission of rumors and, to some extent, has negated the need for accountability and credibility of the source.[19] Although multiple sources are available against which to cross check unverified information, a rumor can be sown into multiple sources, thus confirming—or at least supporting—the rumor's validity. Essentially, groups may have greater access to information, but they do not have the benefit of conducting the kind of face-to-face interaction needed to strip away falsehoods.[20] Regarding false rumors, the danger of the Internet is that, although the truth is always trying to win out, it often "fails to catch up with a lie"[21] before new and unverified information is introduced for consumption. The Internet is now an indisputable source of rumor generation and, deserves study in how it affects the spread and

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[15] Theodore Caplow, "Rumors in War," *Social Forces* 25, no. 1 (1946): 301.

[16] Bordia and Difonzo, "Problem Solving in Social Interactions on the Internet."

[17] Ibid., 47.

[18] Robert Knapp stated that one of the three characteristics of rumor was that it had "a distinct and characteristic mode of transmission—mostly by word of mouth." Knapp, "A Psychology of Rumor," 22.

[19] Ann P. Mintz, "Introduction," in *Web of Deceit: Misinformation and Manipulation in the Age of Social Media*, ed. Ann P. Mintz (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2012).

[20] Ibid., x.

[21] Cass R. Sunstein, *On Rumors: How Falsehoods Spread, Why We Believe Them, and What Can Be Done* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 70.

acceptance of rumors. This point is further elaborated later in this chapter, and throughout the case studies in subsequent chapters.

C. RUMOR THEORY IN U.S. MILITARY DOCTRINE

The Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and U.S. military Special Operations Forces (SOF), originally published tenets of rumor theory in their manuals as part of efforts to counter Axis powers during World War II.[22] Together with Robert Knapp, the OSS prescribed criteria by which rumors could be applied as part of the wider military effort in a white paper entitled "Doctrine Re Rumors," which became the foundation for OSS doctrine on the subject of rumors within its Morale Operations Branch.[23]

The role of rumors has been largely ignored in psychological operations doctrine since the time of the OSS. From the 1960s to the present, rumors have rarely been mentioned in psychological operations doctrine and little discussion is given to the application or techniques for implementing rumors by friendly forces.[24] Although modern doctrine charges U.S. psychological operations soldiers to defeat rumors employed by the enemy, doctrine does not provide knowledge on how to recognize, counter, or effectively craft rumors for offensive purposes.

In March 1990, the Department of Defense published the *Psychological Operations Master Plan*, which outlined the overhaul of psychological operations

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[22] Office of Strategic Services, *Morale Operations Field Manual No 2* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1943).

[23] Office of Strategic Studies Planning Group, *Doctrine Re Rumors* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1943), 16.

[24] U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 33-5: Psychological Operations Techniques and Procedures*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1966); U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 33-1: Psychological Operations*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1979), 2–16; U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-53 Military Information Support Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2013), 4–19; U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.302: Tactical Psychological Operations, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2005); U.S. Department of the Army, *STP 33-37F14-SM-TG: Psychological Operations Specialist, Skill Levels 1 Through 4* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2008); U.S. Department of the Army, *STP 33-37II-OFS: Officer Foundation Standards II, Psychological Operations (37A) Officer's Manual* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2007); U.S. Department of the Defense, *Joint Publications 3-13.2: Psychological Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2010); U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.301: Psychological Operations, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2003); U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.301: Psychological Operations, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2007).

doctrine, planning, education and training, and force structure.[25] This document was intended to modernize capabilities following a prolonged decay dating back to the end of the Vietnam War.[26] The planning document spurred several changes to doctrine, which led to the reincorporation of the basic tenets of rumor theory.[27] In particular, the U.S. military transposed tenets of rumor theory selectively from the work of Allport and Postman, providing a framework to craft, recognize, and counter rumors.[28] However, the U.S. military abandoned these tenets in current doctrine, although doctrine still expresses the need for psychological operations soldiers to be able to counter rumors employed by the enemy effectively.[29]

D. TYPES OF INFLUENCE OPERATIONS AND THEIR ASSOCIATION TO RUMORS

This section focuses on several different doctrinal terms and techniques used in U.S. military influence operations and examines their applicability to rumors. This investigation first requires discussing influence operations as a whole, which is the overarching category under which the doctrinal terms of disinformation, misinformation, and deception are cached.

Perspectives differ on the meaning of influence operations, with definitions ranging from the spreading of deliberately false information to promulgating information based on partial to full-truths to persuade or influence a portion of a population. Despite their differences, the varied definitions of influence operations all espouse the necessity of influencing an audience as a common purpose; without the ability to influence, influence operations would simply entail the aimless sharing of data. Therefore, this study will use the following definition of influence operations from FM

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[25] U.S. Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Psychological Operations Master Plan*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1990), ii–iv.

[26] Ibid., ii.

[27] U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 33-1-1: Psychological Operations Techniques and Procedures*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994), 11–4—11–5.

[28] Allport and Postman, "An Analysis of Rumor," 505.

[29] U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.30: Psychological Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2005), B3.

3–05: “Any form of communication in support of . . . objectives designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes or behavior, of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly.”[30] Defining influence operations in this way allows the study to look at several different types of propaganda, running the gamut of complete truth to complete fabrications.

Influence operations are characteristically classified as belonging to one of three categories: white, gray, or black. White influence operations messages are circulated under the endorsement, or in the very least, with the acknowledgment of the originating source. They are also factually based, which helps to build the credibility of the originator. When influence operations cannot easily be tied to the originator, or the message’s truthfulness is uncertain, it is classified as gray. Influence operations are classified as black when the message is tied to someone besides the originator, and the message may contain false information. Proving the source and accuracy of black influence operations is quite difficult, which makes them ideal for the potential employment of rumors. Thus rumors, due to their obscure origins, are oftentimes either classified as gray or black forms of influence categorically.

Disinformation is a unique subset of influence operations designed to distort information and deceive an adversary.[31] This type of influence operation is accomplished by disseminating false information through clandestine channels, using direct or indirect methods to influence or deceive an opponent’s forces, individuals, or leaders.[32] The key element to disinformation is the employment of false, or partly false, information. Rumors can be used as a type of disinformation because they are sometimes disseminated via clandestine channels and can use some type of false, slanted, or suggestive information to persuade an audience.

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[30] Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.302: Tactical Psychological Operations, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, D–1.

[31] Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.301: Psychological Operations, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, 11–2.

[32] Ibid.

Disinformation is commonly conflated with misinformation. Misinformation is the unintentional release of false information. Therefore, unlike a disinformation operation, misinformation is accidental and, therefore, is not a viable subset of effective influence operations. Although the information shared in some rumors may appear to be the result of an unintended leak, it is not actually the case. Making information appear as though it were unintentionally released is a means to mask the true source of the rumor, or to give it greater appeal; rumors are always thoroughly planned, and therefore, cannot be defined as a form of misinformation.

Military deception (MILDEC) often incorporates rumors as a part of its overall plan. *Joint Publications 3–13.4 Military Deception* defines MILDEC "as those actions executed to deliberately mislead adversary decision makers as to friendly military capabilities, intentions, and operations, thereby causing the adversary to take specific actions (or inactions) that will contribute to the accomplishment of the friendly mission."[33] Essential to this definition is that MILDEC is planned to influence the decision makers of an adversary to gain a marked advantage. To do so, MILDEC uses many different techniques or approaches, such as "surprise, stealth, misinformation, disinformation, [and] false moves."[34]

Rumors are periodically employed as part of an overall MILDEC plan and, are used to reinforce a decision maker's perceptions. For example, as part of Nazi Germany's MILDEC plan supporting Operation Barbarossa—Germany's invasion of Russia on June 22, 1941—the Germans sought to mask their massing of troops and equipment on Russia's border. To deceive Joseph Stalin of its true intentions, Germany displayed indicators that its forces would be conducting an invasion of Great Britain instead—code-named Operation Sea Lion—as a cover for their preparations against Russia. In support of this deception, the Germans circulated rumors among their civilian and military populations to convince these audiences that such an invasion of Great Britain was indeed forthcoming.

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[33] Department of Defense, *Joint Publication: 3-13.4: Military Deception* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2006), I-1.

[34] James Dunnigan and Albert Nofi, *Deception Explained, Described, and Revealed, Victory and Deceit: Dirty Tricks in War* (New York: W. Morrow, 1995), 3.

These rumors were critical to the establishment of Germany's cover story, with German leaders first needing to deceive their own population to mislead Soviet intelligence agents who would draw on such rumors from the wider German population.[35] This information was then, in turn, relayed to the Soviet high command, which briefed Joseph Stalin as the key Soviet decision maker. Rumors circulated, such as Stalin's upcoming visit to the southern German city of Baden-Baden, and restrictions on civilian passenger trains going toward the West convinced Germans to believe that relations between the Soviets and Germans were still intact, and that a future attack on Britain was imminent.[36] The Soviet intelligence apparatus used the information gleaned from these rumors to validate and reinforce other pieces of intelligence which, taken together, indicated that the Germans did not intend to break the Russo-German pact by launching an assault on the Soviet Union.

The example of Germany's preparation for Operation Barbarossa illustrates the utility of rumors when employed as part of a MILDEC plan; however rumors have a wider applicability than simply being a technique in support of MILDEC. As is demonstrated in subsequent chapters through case study analysis, rumors can also be used by a military organization as an end unto themselves, rather than solely being a means to an end. Such a demonstration forces one to consider the broader applicability of rumors. Rumors are an influence conduit that can be tailored to create and reinforce perceptions, as well as to channel the hopes and fears of a population.

E. RUMORS AND INFLUENCE TECHNIQUES

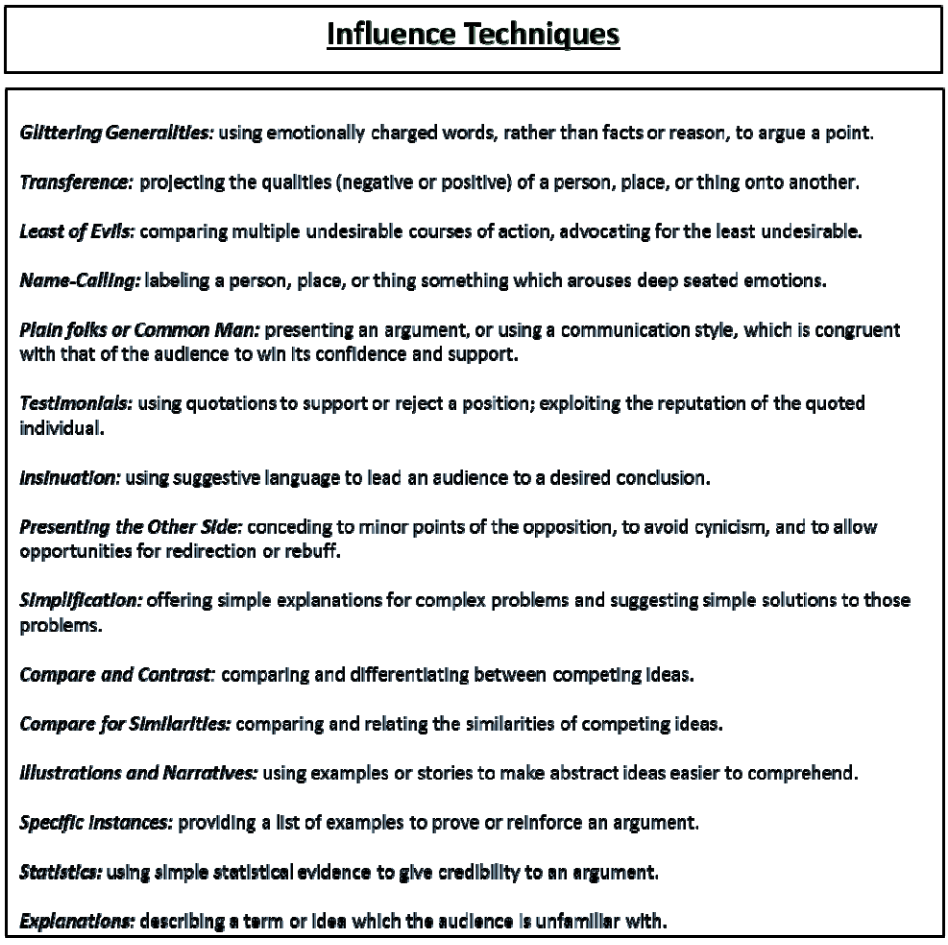
Influence operations can only effectively persuade a target audience by using techniques that frame the argument in a manner that motivates an audience toward a particular behavior. In his article, "Winning the Battle of Ideas: Propaganda, Ideology, and Terror," Kenneth Payne states, "the successful propagandist has grounded their

[35] Russel H. S. Stolfi, "Barbarossa: German Grand Deception and the Achievement of Strategic and Tactical Surprise against the Soviet Union, 1940–1941," in *Strategic Military Deception*, ed. Donald C. Daniel and Katherine L. Herbig (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 200–203.

[36] Ibid., 204.

message in the narrative elements most likely to resonate with the target groups."[37] Current doctrine describes 15 different techniques that present information in a manner that will increase the information's appeal, credibility, and ability to influence a target audience. Presented in Figure 1, the 15 techniques are: glittering generalities, transference, least of evils, name-calling, plain folks or common man, testimonials, insinuation, presenting the other side, simplification, compare and contrast, compare for similarities, illustrations and narratives, specific instances, statistics, and explanations.[38]

Figure 1. Influence Techniques Found in Current U.S. Military Doctrine



Source: U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3–05.301: Psychological Operations, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2003), 5–11.

[37] Kenneth Payne, "Winning the Battle of Ideas: Propaganda, Ideology, and Terror," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 2 (2009): 110.

[38] Department of the Army, *FM 3-05.301*, 5–11.

These techniques appear in both historical and current influence campaigns, validating their applicability, timelessness, and effectiveness. Traditional influence media, such as leaflets, posters, and handbills, only utilize one or two of these techniques to convey a message; however, rumors, as a medium, can incorporate a multitude of these techniques, which helps to increase the appeal of the message to a wider audience.

As an example of this phenomenon, consider a rumor in circulation at a work place that says that the company is going to cut costs over the next six months. To some, this rumor would insinuate that the company would be forced to downsize its labor pool. For others, this rumor would create or reinforce a simplification of good versus evil, whereby the company is either cutting costs to save workers jobs, or the company is attempting to increase profits. Yet, for others, this rumor conjures a compare and contrast scenario, suggesting that the company is being forced to cut costs to save the business and, by extension, the majority of its employees' livelihoods. While this hypothetical example shows how rumors can incorporate many different influence techniques based on individual and group perceptions, it also highlights the flexibility of rumors as an approach to influence. This example further demonstrates that a rumor instigator needs to craft messages in a specific manner to limit the rumor's potential for misinterpretation by both the primary and secondary audiences, as is further described in the next section.

F. PRINCIPLES FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF RUMORS

Drawing from the OSS manual on rumors, an effective rumor "is a simple, brief, concrete and vivid story, purporting to come from inside sources, concerning persons and events familiar to all members of a group," which "provides justification for emotions" and "serves to fill a knowledge gap."[39] An effective rumor is highly self-propelling and resistant to distortion during its transmission. The OSS manual further asserts that all effective rumors share the following characteristics: they are easy to remember; they are based on current interests and circumstances; they exploit emotions and sentiments; and they follow historical precedents.[40] The ineffective rumor can, therefore, be conversely

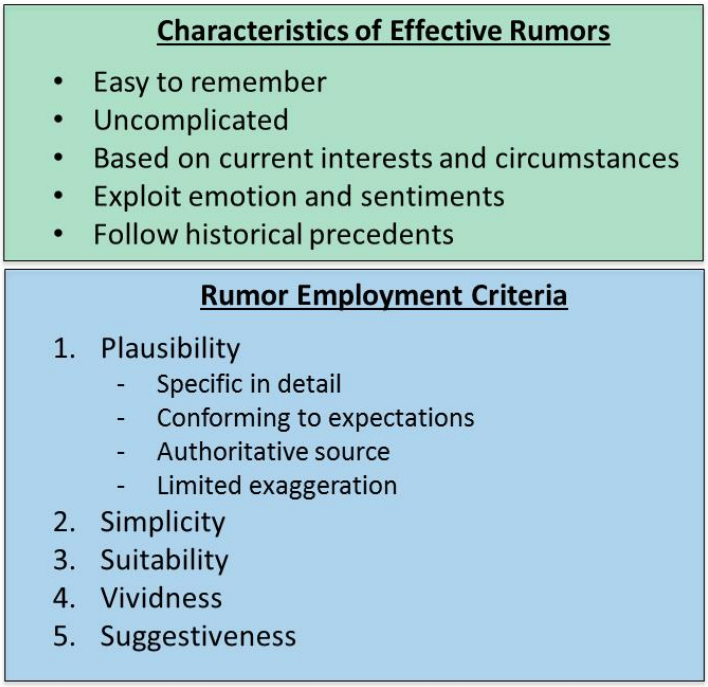
[39] Office of Strategic Studies Planning Group, "Doctrine Re Rumors," 2.

[40] Ibid., 1.

characterized as being overly complicated, unrelated to the current concerns of its audience, dispassionate and unconnected to historical stereotypes.

The OSS manual further asserts that the crafting and employment of effective rumors is more of an art than a science.[41] Akin to the novelist, the rumor instigator must have a knack for producing a story that captures the imagination of his audience. This reliance on creativity and judgment of the individual limits the usefulness of a set of prescriptive rules to follow when developing a rumor. However, by analyzing examples of effective rumors, a collection of "tentative criteria" can be extracted to help guide the appraisal of a rumor during its crafting (Figure 2).[42]

Figure 2. OSS Principles for the Employment of Rumors



Source: Office of Strategic Studies Planning Group, *Doctrine Re Rumors* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1943).

[41] Office of Strategic Studies Planning Group, "Doctrine Re Rumors," 1.

[42] Ibid., 9.

The first criterion of an effective rumor is plausibility. Plausibility is enhanced by the conveyance of seemingly concrete evidence. Referencing specific persons, places, and things reduces the overall ambiguity of the message and allows individuals to receive new information more readily. A lack of explicit detail encourages individuals to ask questions, seeking more information before they are willing to pass the message along to others; after all, an individual's reputation for "honesty, knowledge, and sound judgment" is either increased or decreased by the information shared with others.[43] An individual is rewarded with increased trust and prestige from his peers for sharing reliable information, which fills a knowledge gap, while sharing unreliable information yields opposite results. Renowned sociologist, Tamotsu Shibutani, also observes that "whenever men become conscious of the possibility of being duped, they take special precautions to defend themselves against suggestibility . . . sometimes they become hypercritical, overly careful," and become wholly unwilling to accept and share any information that is potentially faulty, as the conveyance of such information may damage their reputation.[44]

Incorporating the expectations of the target audience into the crafting of the rumor enhances its plausibility. Shibutani further contends that rumors gain traction when "they fit with, and support, the prior convictions of those who accept them."[45] People naturally seek information that confirms, rather than conflicts, with their views of the world, a phenomenon called confirmation bias. If a rumor conforms to what its audience is already conditioned to believe, the audience will more readily accept the new information.[46] When presented with "information that's consistent with [their] existing beliefs," people are quick to accept such information at face value; "information that contradicts [their] beliefs is often ignored or critically scrutinized and discounted."[47] However, if the new information provided in the rumor is a falsehood, it should not be easily verifiable. If the

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[43] Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966), 23.

[44] Ibid., 127.

[45] Sunstein, *On Rumors*, 6.

[46] Laura Gordon-Murnane, "Political Misinformation," in *Web of Deceit: Misinformation and Manipulation in the Age of Social Media*, ed. Ann P. Mintz (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2012), 114.

[47] Thomas E. Kida, *Don't Believe Everything You Think: The 6 Basic Mistakes We Make in Thinking* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006), 156.

new information cannot be easily verified, and if it cannot be easily denied, the information will more likely survive screening by its audience.

Furthermore, the plausibility of a rumor is enhanced if it is given the appearance of being inside information "which has leaked from an authoritative source."[48] The authoritative source need not be known, a fictitious character would suffice, so long as the character is attributed with unique access to the information. Knapp argues that the purpose of attributing the information to a "high authoritative source" is that it gives "the rumor both prestige and the appearance of veracity," which are essential to convince others to share the information.[49]

The plausibility of a rumor can also be enhanced by limiting the exaggeration of the rumor's supposed facts. As Allport and Postman argue, the main motive for circulating rumors is to "find a plausible reason for a confused situation;"[50] in other words, the rumor has to satisfy the demands of the inquiring audience ably with an explanation that is logical. For a rumor to propagate, therefore, it must masquerade as the truth; something that is too fantastic to believe will be dismissed out of hand by members of its target audience.

The second criterion is simplicity. A simple story is easier to remember and is thus easier to pass along. The addition of unnecessary supplementary information only increases the likelihood that key components of the rumor will be excluded. Furthermore, rumors that are too complex may end up confusing the target audience and, in turn, the audience may misconstrue the message as it is passed along. During its propagation, the rumor will likely undergo modification by members of its target audience, making the rumor more complex than originally intended; it therefore makes little sense to overburden the rumor with unnecessary details at its inception.

The third criterion is suitability. A rumor is suitable when it is designed to achieve the objective for which it was created; in other words, the rumor should be fashioned to

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[48] Office of Strategic Studies Planning Group, "Doctrine Re Rumors," 10.

[49] Knapp, "A Psychology of Rumor," 29.

[50] Allport and Postman, "An Analysis of Rumor," 503.

fulfill its purpose. Suitability is a function of the audience's familiarity with, and disposition toward, the information being presented in the rumor. For example, the OSS manual contends that a rumor intended to enflame the passions of its target audience "can be short and uncomplicated by qualifications and complexities of plot."[51] By contrast, a rumor intended to "suggest new attitudes should be embedded in an interesting narrative allowing room for development of details and some complexity of plot."[52]

The fourth criterion is vividness. Vividness refers to the qualities of the rumor that make it interesting and worthy of sharing. The OSS manual asserts that rumors that have "strong emotional content," and which are entertaining, "are likely to be most effective."[53] Personal stories shared between individuals are more engaging and more credible than impersonal scientific evidence because a personal story can be emotionally charged.[54] Sunstein summarizes, "When rumors produce strong emotions—disgust, anger, outrage—people are far more likely to spread them."[55] Knowledge of what the target audience finds to be most emotionally provocative is crucial to satisfy this criterion; the rumor instigator must understand the audience's psyche so that the rumor is designed to play effectively on the fears and hopes of that audience.

The fifth and final criterion of an effective rumor is suggestiveness. Although appearing to be at odds with the first criterion of plausibility, the two need not be mutually exclusive. Suggestiveness offers that, in some instances, a rumor is more effective when its content or conclusion is left open for interpretation by the audience. Suggestiveness is particularly useful when attempting to spread fear and doubt among a population.[56] Individuals who are allowed to figure out the hidden meanings of messages or to draw their own conclusions based upon scantly provided information are more

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[51] Office of Strategic Studies Planning Group, "Doctrine Re Rumors," 3.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Kida, *Don't Believe Everything You Think*, 37.

[55] Sunstein, *On Rumors*, 59.

[56] Office of Strategic Studies Planning Group, "Doctrine Re Rumors," 11.

likely to internalize the message, and are more willing to pass along such self-made revelations to their peers.

G. PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEFENSE AGAINST RUMORS

A fundamental truth of military tactics is that the side on the offense gains the advantage of the initiative and is able to strike the enemy at a time and place of their choosing. The defender can, and should, prepare as strong a position as possible to prevent or reduce the impact of the attack; however, even the strongest defense has vulnerabilities, which the attacker will seek to exploit. Once committed, the defender is challenged to neutralize the attack, awaiting an opportunity to wrest the initiative away by conducting a counteroffensive.

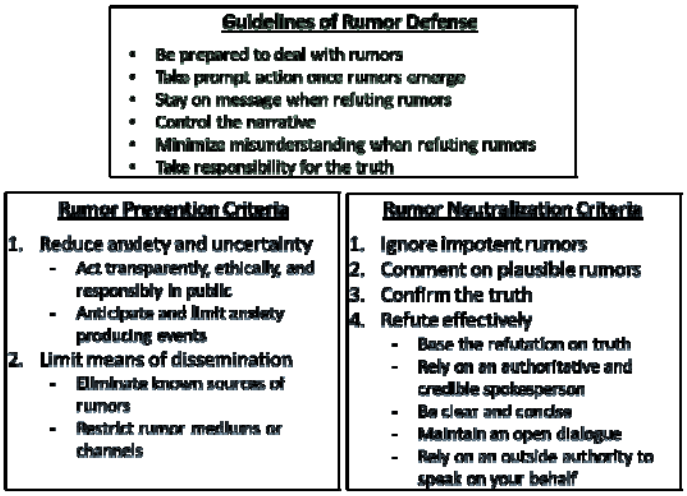
The commander and his staff should prepare as strong a defense as possible against the employment of rumors by the enemy; however, even the strongest defense will not prevent the circulation of all rumors. An adversary employing rumors against an opponent maintains the initiative and is able to assess vulnerabilities of their target, is capable of determining the most advantageous time to initiate a rumor, and can craft a rumor that will have the greatest possible impact. Acknowledging that a strong defense cannot prevent all attacks, once a potentially harmful rumor has been identified, the commander and his staff must then take steps to neutralize the effects of that rumor.

Strategies for how a military organization should defend against rumors, including both preventing the employment of rumors and neutralizing their effect if employed, cannot be found in current doctrine or training of the U.S. military. However, principles of defense against rumors can be gleaned from the business sector, where firms are frequently faced with the challenge of combating rumors employed against their organizations by outside entities. Andrew Hiles, a consultant for reputation and risk management, has compiled a set of guidelines for rumor defense in the business world, which includes the following: being prepared to deal with the circulation of rumors; taking prompt action against rumors once they emerge; staying on message and

controlling the narrative; minimizing misunderstanding when refuting rumors; and taking responsibility when the rumors are actually the unacknowledged truth.[57]

From these overarching guidelines, Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow distill a set of criteria for the prevention and neutralization of rumors levied against a business by exterior agents.[58] To prevent rumors from circulating, the criteria require the reduction of environmental anxiety and uncertainty, and limiting the means of rumor dissemination. To neutralize rumors in circulation, the criteria advocate ignoring impotent rumors, commenting on plausible rumors, confirming the truth, and refuting falsehoods effectively. These criteria, depicted in Figure 3, can be adapted by a military organization to build a defense against an adversary's employment of rumors.

Figure 3. Principles for the Defense against Rumors



Source: Andrew Hiles, "How Firms Should Fight Rumors," in *Reputation Management: Building and Protecting Your Company's Profile in a Digital World*, ed. Andrew Hiles (London: A&C Black, 2011).

[57] Andrew Hiles, "How Firms Should Fight Rumors," in *Reputation Management: Building and Protecting Your Company's Profile in a Digital World*, edited by Andrew Hiles (London: A&C Black, — 2011), 6.

[58] Prashant Bordia, Nicholas Difonzo, and Ralph Rosnow, "Reigning in Rumors," *Organizational Dynamics* 23, no. 1 (1994): 56.

Preparing a defense, which prevents the employment of rumors against an organization, involves efforts to reduce the likelihood that rumors will be generated in the first place.[59] Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow contend that an organization seeking to prevent the generation of rumors can do so "by reducing the conditions (uncertainty and anxiety) that make people susceptible to them."[60] Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow further assert that steps taken to reduce uncertainty and anxiety include the explanation of otherwise unexplained events; acting transparently, ethically, and responsibly with the public; and making efforts to anticipate rumors with the intent of avoiding the generation of "uncertainty or anxiety-producing events."[61] Additionally, an organization can prevent the employment of rumors by limiting an adversary's means to disseminate its message by eliminating known sources of damaging rumors—key individuals or groups—and by restricting channels or mediums that have previously facilitated the propagation of rumors.

An organization will not be able to inhibit the circulation of all rumors; therefore, the commander and his staff should be prepared to neutralize the effects of rumors that gain traction with the public. To neutralize the effects of rumors employed against it, an organization should commit to the following: to ignore rumors that are judged to be impotent, comment on inquiries to plausible rumors, confirm the truth, and refute rumors effectively.[62]

Being able to discern which rumors have the potential to gain mass appeal and which are likely to self-terminate is an essential part of the organization's defense against rumors. Ignoring rumors that are too implausible to gain significant traction on their own is often a better strategy than acknowledging them. By repeating or acknowledging a preposterous rumor, an organization may actually give the rumor an undue amount of credibility, furthering its longevity and appeal.[63]

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[59] Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow, "Reigning in Rumors," 56.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 57.

[63] Ibid.

However, it is imperative to comment on believable rumors. Commenting on plausible rumors is a better course of action than ignoring inquiries about them altogether. Intentionally ignoring an inquiry about a plausible rumor creates an unintended response to the question; it indicates that there might be something to hide. Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow claim that no response "will most likely give more credence to the rumor" than it had in the first place.[64]

As "rumors often contain a grain of truth," Bordiam, Difonzo, and Rosnow argue that an effective way of neutralizing a rumor "is to confirm the part that is true."[65] Confirming the truth, while denying falsehoods associated with a rumor, will aid in building an organization's reputation for transparency, and will foster a trusting relationship with the public. It will also prevent an adversary from building more falsehoods on top of the truth with subsequent rumors.

Rumors that are the most plausible and able to inflict the most damage to an organization require an effective refutation. Any refutation should be based on truth, rather than falsehoods, as the response given by an organization is sure to undergo scrutiny by the public; a discovery of dishonesty in the response would be doubly damaging.

The spokesperson for the organization needs to be perceived as credible for rumors to be successfully refuted. Credibility is an attribute ascribed to the spokesperson by the public; it must be cultivated rather than demanded. As Kouzes and Posner argue, "credibility, like reputation, is something that is earned over time,"[66] it is not automatically given to a person. Credibility is a function of both objective and subjective components. Objective components include a person's rank or position, established reliability based upon precedent, and their professional expertise. Subjective components of credibility are based upon a person's charisma, their physical appearance and personal characteristics. Individuals who are perceived as credible are often characterized as being

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[64] Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow, "Reigning in Rumors," 58.

[65] Ibid.

[66] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 25.

honest, visionary, inspirational, competent, and adaptive to their environment.[67] Therefore, to speak with authority on the organization's behalf successfully, the spokesperson for the organization should carry sufficient rank, should possess recognized professional knowledge, and should have established rapport with the public.

The refutation provided needs to be concise and easy to understand, as Bordia and Difonzo note, "denials that are lengthy, vague, and verbose are unconvincing and sound like a cover-up."[68] Refutations should be provided in an open forum, allowing the organization's spokesperson and the public to participate in an open dialogue to dispel uncertainty and to build trust. Finally, if the organization is unable to refute a rumor on its own effectively, it should consider using a trustworthy authority from outside the organization to speak on its behalf; in other words, it should outsource the credibility.

H. IMPLICATIONS OF TECHNOLOGY FOR RUMOR EFFECTIVENESS

Rumors were traditionally thought to be a phenomenon spread only by word of mouth, evoking the image of a literal whisper campaign. However, the means by which rumors spread has evolved with advances in technology.[69] Today, rumors can spread as a result of viewing suggestive print media, radio broadcasts, intercepted phone conversations, television broadcasts, or information received from various social media outlets on the Internet (blogs, picture-sharing, video logs, wall postings, email, instant messenger services, etc.).[70] Anthropologist Nils Bubant argues that it is the "intermodality of rumor, its ability to piggyback on and intersect with other media, printed and electronic, legitimate and illegitimate . . . [which] gives it reach and impact."[71]

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[67] Kouzes and Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand*, 13–20.

[68] Prashant Bordia and Nicholas Difonzo, "Toward a Dynamic Social Impact Theory of Rumor," in *The Science of Social influence: Advances and Future Progress*, ed. Anthony Pratkanis (Oxford: UK: Psychology Press, 2011), 60.

[69] Knapp, "A Psychology of Rumor," 22.

[70] Dana R. Fisher, "Rumoring Theory and the Internet a Framework for Analyzing the Grass Roots," *Social Science Computer Review* 16, no. 2 (1998): 159.

[71] Daniel Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism, and the Struggle for Strategic* Influence (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2012), 130, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10593846.

Furthermore, Bordia and Difonzo argue that the means by which a rumor spreads has an impact on its overall effectiveness, given that "a rumor's influence is dependent on how extensively it has dispersed."[72] Technology's effect on the information age has implications for the speed at which a rumor travels, the reach a rumor has across social networks, and for masking the identity of its source. Specializing in the research of online ethics, Anne Mintz points out that the bending of truth—telling lies and spreading rumors—is not something new, "it's just the messenger who has changed, and this messenger spreads the word lightning fast and to far-flung places."[73]

The advent of the Internet, with its capacity for spreading information at minimal cost, has increased the capability of a rumor to influence a population. As a communication tool, the Internet has revolutionized the way in which information is organized and shared within and across populations. As Fischer contends, the Internet has the ability to "bring together social networks of concerned individuals both within a community and throughout a larger international or even virtual community" in ways never before imagined.[74]

Social impact theory suggests a plausible reason why rumors would have more impact once diffused across a virtual community. As Latané observes, rumors occur in social space configurations, which are patterns of relationship between people.[75] Latané explains: "Social space configurations are important because they directly affect immediacy and numbers of influence sources, two key social impact factors."[76] The Internet decreases the social space between the nodes of a network connected by hubs, which would otherwise exist in isolation from one another, significantly increasing the immediacy and number of nodes with access to a rumor. Given this lack of isolation, Bordia and Difonzo assert that rumors on the Internet "quickly make their way to hubs

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[72] Bordia and Difonzo, "Toward a Dynamic Social Impact Theory of Rumor," 277.

[73] Mintz, "Introduction," x.

[74] Fisher, "Rumoring Theory and the Internet a Framework for Analyzing the Grass Roots," 159.

[75] Bibb Latané, "Dynamic Social Impact: The Creation of Culture by Communication," *Journal of Communication* 46, no. 4 (1996).

[76] Bordia and Difonzo, "Toward a Dynamic Social Impact Theory of Rumor," 285.

who then broadcast them widely," effectively spreading the rumor across several nodes, "rapidly saturating the network."[77]

As a form of casual communication, rumors are ideally suited to spread by way of the Internet, because, as a medium for communication, the Internet offers an "inherently informal structure," for which "it is impossible to both limit who posts information . . . and to validate much of the information appearing there."[78] Furthermore, the Internet has loosened the control of journalism by creating new methods for accessing information, while at the same time allowing more people the ability to generate content for public consumption. Seib points out that this loosening of control by traditional sources, and the public's subsequent reliance on nontraditional sources for information, has weakened responsible practices of journalism in favor of speed and sensationalism, over a more methodical process yielding greater accuracy.[79]

Cyber-journalism has resulted in a significant increase in content available to the public; a glut of information can overwhelm the capacity of its audience to validate such information before being bombarded with new information. Furthermore, information on the Internet is taken at face value if it is already aligned with a person's preconceptions. In other instances, Davis notes that information that would otherwise be considered too incredible, gains "legitimacy by virtue of its widespread dissemination and constant repetition."[80] Similarly, Sunstein argues that the Internet increases the believability of information simply because the Internet allows for the repeated viewing, sharing, and confirmation of information from multiple sources (sometimes in a circular fashion).[81] According to Sunstein, "as more people defer, thus making the crowd grow, there is a real risk that large groups of people will believe rumors even though they are entirely

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[77] Bordia and Difonzo, "Toward a Dynamic Social Impact Theory of Rumor," 288.

[78] Fisher, "Rumoring Theory and the Internet a Framework for Analyzing the Grass Roots," 160.

[79] Philip M. Seib, *Going Live: Getting the News Right in a Real-time, Online World* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 143.

[80] Richard Davis, *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44.

[81] Sunstein, *On Rumors*, 8.

false."[82] Moreover, even if only a portion of the antecedent rumor were accepted as truth by the individual, any information received thereafter would be compared against, or built upon, the previous fabrication, as "first impressions tend to persist, even when the initial evidence on which these impressions were based is discredited."[83]

I. CONCLUSION

This chapter began with a review of the significant academic literature on the social phenomenon of rumor, and provided a brief overview of U.S. military influence doctrine, beginning with the earliest publications on the subject by the OSS during World War II, and ending with doctrine currently in circulation. It emphasized a gap in current U.S. military doctrine regarding how rumors are generated and spread for the purpose of either effectively employing or defending against them.

Two sets of principles based on the tenets of rumor theory also provided important insights. The first set of principles demonstrated that successful rumors are characteristically uncomplicated and easy to remember, they are based on the current interests and circumstances of their audience, they exploit emotions and sentiments, and they follow historical precedents. Successful rumors also require the satisfaction of five criteria: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and—in some cases—suggestiveness.

The second set of principles, relating to the defense against rumors, demonstrated the need for being prepared to deal with rumors, taking prompt action once rumors emerge, staying on message when refuting rumors, controlling the narrative, minimizing misunderstanding when refuting rumors, and taking responsibility for the truthful elements of any rumor. The prevention of rumors requires a reduction of environmental anxiety and ambiguity, while limiting an adversary's means to disseminate rumors. The neutralization of rumors requires ignoring those that are impotent, commenting on those that are plausible, confirming the truth, and refuting falsehoods effectively.

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[82] Ibid., 21.

[83] Bordia and Difonzo, "Toward a Dynamic Social Impact Theory of Rumor," 277.

Finally, the chapter addressed how technological advances, particularly the Internet, have changed the propagation and effectiveness of rumors, including the speed of information and the ability of anyone to report information and spread rumors as factors that increase the likelihood that false information will be circulated, accepted as truth, and built upon.

The next chapter uses these insights to analyze three cases in which rumors were utilized effectively, noting the presence or absence of the principles for rumor employment purported in this chapter.

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III. TESTING THE PRINCIPLES OF RUMOR EMPLOYMENT: EFFECTIVE RUMORS FROM WWII TO THE INFORMATION AGE

A. INTRODUCTION

Chapter II offered a working definition of successful rumors, proposing that they are highly self-propelling and resistant to distortion during transmission, are characteristically easy to remember, uncomplicated in detail, based on current interests, exploiting emotion and sentiments, and following historical precedents. From these characteristics, the previous chapter proposed a set of required criteria for the effective employment of rumors: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness.

This chapter analyzes three cases of successful rumor employment to test the proposed criteria: the British use of rumors to discourage an attempt at invasion by Nazi Germany during WWII; the use of rumors to advance the theory of a Zionist connection to the September 11 attacks; and the Indonesian government's use of a rumor to posthumously denounce a terrorist leader. Each case is first described in detail to provide context for discussion, followed by an observation of each criterion. Additionally, the effect of technology on a rumor's propagation is also accounted for where applicable.

These case studies reveal that the criteria for the effective employment of rumors must be satisfied if a rumor is to propagate successfully; these case studies also demonstrate the crucial role of technology in amplifying the reach and impact of rumors. The cases suggest that where the proposed criteria are not satisfied, or where the criteria conflict, a rumor will not become self-propelling or will become unrecognizably distorted from its original form; thus, failing to propagate effectively and influence the intended target audience.

B. IN THE DEFENSE OF BRITAIN

After the British defeat in the 1940 Battle of France and evacuation from Dunkirk, they began to craft and circulate numerous rumors to boost morale among their forces while, at the same time, attempting to instill fear into the German units training for the

invasion of Great Britain. The rumors varied from Britain having placed an order with the Australian government for 27 sharks that might be released into the English Channel, to the development of new and markedly advanced Allied weaponry.[84] This section focuses on one of the most widely circulated and best-documented rumors of the period, the British incendiary weapon rumor.

The incendiary weapon rumor—that suggested that the British could set the English Channel ablaze to thwart an invasion attempt—was the brainchild of a British propagandist named John Baker White. White's inspiration for the rumor came from a demonstration held on the shores of St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe in Southeastern Britain.[85] Here, the British assembled an improvised irrigation system that pumped a combustible mixture from supply tanks to sprinkler-like devices.[86] Once dispersed on the beach and ignited, the burning substance continued its spread down to the waterline before extinguishment.[87] The burning beach concept was short-lived, because it became apparent that the apparatus was unlikely to survive the enemy's pre-invasion bombardment.[88] However, White investigated the possibility of setting the sea itself on fire. British experts deemed the endeavor plausible, but determined that it would need an extravagant system that would be too costly to construct.[89] Nevertheless, because the concept was still plausible, White believed that such an idea would be the excellent basis for a rumor.

White, a member of the British Underground Propaganda Committee (UPC), along with his colleagues, developed and submitted the draft rumor for approval on September 27, 1940.[90] The UPC was part of a secret organization called Department Electra House, which conducted subversion and psychological warfare on behalf of the

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[84] Lee Richards, *Whispers of War; Underground Propaganda Rumour-mongering in the Second World War*, accessed March 3, 2015, www.psywar.org, 14–16.

[85] John Baker White, *The Big Lie* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1955), 2–3.

[86] Ibid., 2.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Richards, *Whispers of War*, 8.

[89] White, *The Big Lie*, 5.

[90] Richards, *Whispers of War*, 7–8.

British government.[91] The following extract from an UPC memo describes the rumor in more detail.

> The British have a new weapon. It is a mine to be dropped from aircraft. In distinction from other mines, however, it does not explode, but spreads a very thin film of highly inflammable and volatile liquid over the surface of the water for an enormous area. The mine's further action then ignites this liquid provoking a terrible flame.[92]

After British authorities reviewed and approved the idea, the UPC immediately implemented the rumor with wide dissemination across occupied Europe through various channels.

Initially, the UPC received very little feedback on the spread of the rumor. As several weeks went by, all intelligence gathered from neutral capitals, prisoners or war, and other channels showed no mention of the rumor.[93] Then, the UPC received accounts from two downed German pilots, each from different squadrons, who confirmed that the rumor was common knowledge among Luftwaffe aviators.[94] Later, a Royal Air Force (RAF) airstrike helped give further credibility to the rumor. While conducting a routine attack on German invasion barges operating in the French harbor of Calais, the RAF inadvertently strengthened the rumor by striking a German infantry battalion with incendiary bombs while they rehearsed a cross-Channel invasion.[95] Following the attack, the burned German soldiers were transferred to medical facilities in Paris, where the rumor was already in circulation.[96] The population perceived the injured soldiers as evidence that the British did in fact have a new weapon that could light the sea on fire. The rumor, supported by this unrelated event, increased the morale of the occupied Parisians. In his memoirs, White recounted that, "the French, who had not lost their sense

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[91] Richards, *Whispers of War*, 4.

[92] Underground Propaganda Committee, *FO 898/70; Friday, 27 September 1940 Rumor Memo* (London: GPO, 1940).

[93] Richards, *Whispers of War*, 5.

[94] White, *The Big Lie*, 6.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Richards, *Whispers of War*, 8.

of humor, would pretend to warm their hands at Germans sitting next to them in cafés and restaurants."[97]

After this feedback, the British continued to reinforce the rumor. For example, the British political warfare branch developed replicas of German travel tickets used on leave, and disseminated them by air over the occupied territories.[98] The leaflets were nearly identical to the original leave passes in font, color, and style, making them an inviting discovery for the common German soldier. However, the British made several modifications to the original leave forms with the aim of reinforcing the incendiary weapon rumor. For instance, they replaced the *Return Journey* header with a *One-Way Only* header, while substituting the *Destination* of Germany with Britain.[99] Additionally, the British modified the bodies of the leaflets to describe vividly what the German soldiers should expect during their journey with a narration that "promised not the Mosel wine and other pleasures of leave, but a reception of burning seas and steam baths."[100] Although it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of the leaflet, it aimed to reinforce the incendiary weapon rumor, and most likely, forced the Germans to ponder the effects that British incendiary weapons could have against an invading force.

Besides the use of leaflets and the fortuitous evidence provided by the RAF bombing, radio broadcasts also reinforced the rumor. Sefton Delmer, a British journalist turned propagandist during the war, recounts in his autobiography that on July 16, 1940, he directly promoted the incendiary weapon rumor during a *BBC* radio broadcast. Delmer describes having provided German listeners with a handy English lesson to assist them during the invasion: "for your first lesson we will take: *Die Kanalüberfahrt* . . . the Channel crossing, the Channel crossing."[101] Sefton then discussed how to say the boat is sinking in English, and provided the Germans a critical verb to conjugate: *brennen* (to

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[97] White, *The Big Lie*, 6.

[98] Richards, *Whispers of War*, 9.

[99] White, *The Big Lie*, 8.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Sefton Delmer, *Black Boomerang: An Autobiography, Volume Two* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1962), 21.

burn).[102] Although radio broadcasts were not used during the rumor's initial dissemination, Sefton's account demonstrates how technology was used to help reinforce the rumor.

As the rumor of the incendiary weapon continued to permeate the German ranks, its military command was forced to recognize the British weapon as a possible threat to a cross-Channel invasion. Germans began to experiment with potential countermeasures to such a weapon in the small harbor city of Fécamp, located Northeast of Caen.[103] Here, the Germans "armored a barge with asbestos sheets which they filled with troops and steered into a pool of burning gasoline," to the effect that "all on board were burned to death."[104] The Germans were unable to recover all the burnt bodies, after which some eventually floated ashore along the northern coast of France.[105] This botched attempt to produce a countermeasure was doubly damning, as the Germans still failed to find a solution to neutralize the new threat posed by this British weapon, while subsequently helping to validate the rumor by demonstrating its potential effectiveness to the German soldier and civilian populations of occupied Europe.

Building off the criteria of successful rumors developed in Chapter II, this rumor is evaluated on the following five criteria: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness.

1. Plausibility

The UPC crafted the incendiary weapon rumor with plausibility in mind. At the rumor's genesis, White believed that the common German soldier had very little experience on the ocean; thus, a potential cross-Channel voyage would naturally generate extreme anxiety in the German ranks.[106] Such a lack of knowledge, and the accompanying fear and anxiety, created the need for German soldiers to gain information

[102] Delmer, *Black Boomerang*, 21.

[103] White, *The Big Lie*, 8.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., 4.

regarding expected likely conditions during the invasion. The British incendiary weapon rumor helped fill this information gap, which the Germans more readily received due to their increased anxiety.[107] White also examined historical cases of other seaborne invasion attempts and found that a preponderance of such accounts recalled the use of incendiary weapons by the defender. For example, incendiary weapons were used during the Crusades, from the employment of fire-ships by Sir Francis Drake against the Spanish Armada, to the flamethrower first introduced during World War I.[108] Furthermore, White found that incendiary weapons were often employed because of their tangible effectiveness as well as the psychological impact they had on a military force.[109] The British development of such a weapon, therefore, seemed to fit the logical evolution of and employment of incendiary weapons that could not be easily dismissed.

2. Simplicity

The UPC also followed the characteristic of simplicity in constructing their rumor. The original rumor contained little supplementary information about the new incendiary weapon: omitting specific information about the weapon's effectiveness and technical data, such as how much surface area the flames would cover. It was not necessary to overburden the rumor with such details; as described in Chapter II, a rumor typically evolves as it spreads through a population, with the audience adding its own supplementary information. For example, the original incendiary weapon rumor was modified and significantly elaborated after having made its way back to Britain, where the rumor began to circulate among the British civilian population. Such supplementary information included British naval forces having brought ashore German soldiers with bandaged hands and faces as a result of burn injuries at the coastal cities of Harwich, Newhaven, and Dover.[110]

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[107] White, *The Big Lie*, 4.

[108] Ibid., 1.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., 9.

Another story in circulation included "a convoy of ambulances arriving in the dead of night at a hospital outside Norwich, and an "S.O.S." [being] sent to other hospitals in the area for anti-burn dressings."[111] Others alleged to hear of a huge column of smoke arising from Sandwich Bay, which supposedly was the secret site used to bury the charred bodies of German soldiers.[112] Having no factual basis, such elaborations added credibility to the original rumor, helping to substantiate the existence of Britain's new weapon.

3. Suitability

As noted, the incendiary weapon rumor had two goals from its inception: to increase the morale of friendly forces and to sew fear and doubt in the mind of the German soldier. The practice of dark-humor related to the incendiary weapon by French citizens against German soldiers, specifically French pretending to warm themselves from German soldiers, demonstrates the rumor's ability to bolster morale in occupied France. Similarly, the British people experienced an upsurge in boldness as a result of the various incendiary weapon rumor derivatives in circulation.

The rumor was also effective in creating fear among the Germans. The German command would not have made efforts to fireproof its invading force had the rumor not been effective. Furthermore, White spoke with ex-Wehrmacht officers after the war and discovered that, by the middle of 1940, the rumor convinced thousands of Germans along the French coast and in the Low Countries that if an invasion attempt on Great Britain had been made, a large number of their comrades would have been killed in the flaming sea.[113] Based on this evidence, the incendiary weapon rumor was appropriately crafted to achieve its initial objectives.

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[111] White, *The Big Lie*, 9.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

4. Vividness

The vividness of the incendiary weapon rumor made it exciting and gossip-worthy. The strong emotional content of the rumor was effective for both British and German populations. For the British, the rumor transformed despair into hope following the Battle of Dunkirk. The rumor gave the British confidence in their ability to repel a German invasion force. For the Germans, the rumor invoked doubt and apprehension; such a weapon would cause the Germans to incur significant casualties, possibly denying them the ability to conduct a cross-Channel invasion altogether.

5. Suggestiveness

As exhibited by various accounts in this section, the rumor's content and conclusion were left open for interpretation. Different target audiences reached different conclusions based upon scantly provided information. Suggestiveness, the last of the required criteria for a successful rumor, was incorporated and aided the successfulness of the rumor by increasing its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and the varied demands from its multiple audiences.

C. ZIONIST PLOTTING OF 9/11

In the wake of September 11, 2001, the world—particularly the Western world—was left in a state of shock. The heinous attacks of that day, committed seemingly without provocation, magnified an already present state of anxiety, fear, and distrust in the world; such conditions helped prompt the development and circulation of several rumors as a means to cope with this pronounced feeling of uncertainty. The most successful of these rumors was the claim that 4,000 Jewish people failed to report to work on September 11; it became known as the Zionist conspiracy rumor.

The Zionist conspiracy rumor was widely accepted throughout the Middle East as a means to explain away the attacks. Reinforced by the presence of already strong anti-Semitic rhetoric across the region, the Zionist conspiracy rumor had great utility; it assigned blame for the attacks to the Jewish people, a common scapegoat, while sheltering Arabs from any associated guilt. It was an impressive feat given that all 19

hijackers were Arab: 15 were from Saudi Arabia, the remaining four were from the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Lebanon.[114]

According to U.S. Department of State research, the Zionist conspiracy rumor can be traced to the September 15, 2001, edition of the Syrian government owned newspaper, *Al Thawra*, which first published the claim that 4,000 Jews had been absent from work on the day of the attacks, as a result of foreknowledge given to them about the pending catastrophes.[115] On September 17, *al-Manor,* a Beirut-based satellite television station owned by Hezbollah, communicated the Zionist conspiracy rumor to an international audience.[116] Al-Manor's report cited *al-Watan*, an obscure Jordanian newspaper, as the original source of the information; al-Manor also reported that the Jews had received hints of the pending attacks from the Israeli Security Agency, commonly known as *Shin Bet*.[117] The report further elaborated upon the rumor, going so far as to claim that the Israeli secret service, the *Mosad*, was responsible for the attacks.[118] However, investigations into these claims yielded no evidence that the *al-Watan* newspaper was the source.[119]

While difficult to establish with certainty which publication was the original source of the Zionist conspiracy rumor, the rumor's specific reference to 4,000 Jews came from the September 12, 2001, edition of the *Jerusalem Post*.[120] This edition included an article entitled "Hundreds of Israelis Missing in WTC Attack," and stated that "the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem has so far received the names of 4,000 Israelis believed to have been in the areas of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon at the time

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[114] "11 September 2001 Hijackers," accessed May 25, 2015, https://www.cia.gov/news-information/speeches-testimony/2002/DCI_18_June_testimony_new.pdf.

[115] "The 4,000 Jews Rumor, Rumor Surrounding Sept. 11th Proved Untrue," accessed May 19, 2015, http://web.archive.org/web/20070211085836/http://usinfo.state.gov/media/Archive/2005/Jan/14-260933.html.

[116] Avi Jorisch, "Al-Manor: Hizbullah TV," *The Middle East Quarterly* 11 (2004), http://www.meforum.org/583/al-manar-hizbullah-tv-24-7?iframe=true&width=100%&height=100%#_ftn70.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Bryan Curtis, "4,000 Jews, 1 Lie; Tracking and Internet Hoax," Slate, October 5, 2001, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/tangled_web/2001/10/4000_jews_1_lie.html.

[120] "The 4,000 Jews Rumor, Rumor Surrounding Sept. 11th Proved Untrue."

of the attacks."[121] While the article noted that as many as 4,000 Jews had possibly been affected by the attacks, it made no reference to Jewish people failing to report to work on September 11, nor did it indicate that any Jews had foreknowledge of the looming attack. The date of publication for the *Jerusalem Post* article, in relation to the appearance of the Zionist conspiracy rumor circulated in other publications, seems to suggest that the creators of the rumor had used the Israeli article as the basis for their inspiration.

As with the British incendiary weapon rumor, the Zionist conspiracy rumor received assistance from other substantiating evidence, meant to reinforce its validity; however, unlike the evidence presented to support the British rumor, proof for the Zionist conspiracy rumor was unsubstantiated at best. One such bit of evidence was found in a coded Microsoft Word message, which presumably predicted the attacks and Jewish involvement.[122] It was revealed that if the characters NYC were typed into Microsoft Word under the "Wingdings" font, the characters are represented by ✡✡✍. For believers of the rumor, the allegedly coded message in Wingdings established a possible mode of communication used to disseminate the warning. It also fueled the general conspiracy that Israelites played a well-planned part in the attacks since the coding dates back to 1992.

The Zionist conspiracy rumor has also been included in a variety of anti-Semitic literature like that of popular African American civil rights activist, dramatist, novelist, and poet, Amiri Baraka. In September 2002, Baraka presented his poem *Who Blew Up America?* at the Geraldine R. DoDge Poetry Festival at Waterloo Village in Stanhope, New Jersey.[123] In the poem, Baraka directly references and ultimately aids in the rumor's propagation:

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[121] The Jerusalem Post Internet Staff, "Hundreds of Israelis Missing in WTC Attack," *The Internet Jerusalem Post*, September 12, 2001, http://web.archive.org/web/20070404060550/http://www.fpp.co.uk/online/02/10/JerusPost120901.html.

[122] Stephen O'Leary, "Rumors of Grace and Terror," *Online Journalism Review*, April 2, 2002, http://pascalfroissart.free.fr/3-cache/2002-oleary.pdf.

[123] Ceilidh Erickson, "In Newark, Amiri Baraka Recites Infamous Poem Again, This Time to Applause," Capital, October 11, 2010, http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/culture/2010/10/593578/newark-amiri-baraka-recites-infamous-poem-again-time-applause.

Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed?
Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers
To stay home that day?
Why did Sharon[124] stay away?[125]

Perhaps the most notable reference reinforcing the rumor is found in a 2010 public address by then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad stated, "no 'Zionists' were killed in the World Trade Center . . . because 'one day earlier they were told not go to their workplace.'"[126] Not only does this demonstrate Ahmadinejad's exploitation of the rumor for political gain by leveraging a prevailing notion of anti-Semitism across the region, it also illustrates how enduring the Zionist conspiracy rumor is, with Ahmadinejad making such a statement nine years after the rumor first began circulating.

Although the Zionist conspiracy rumor has been pervasively propagated throughout the world, it is difficult to ascertain the rumor's actual impact. Nonetheless, a few examples provide a glimpse of the rumor's overall ability to influence. First, a number of articles appear on the U.S. Department of State's website explaining and dispelling the rumor's claim of no Jewish causalities.[127] This attempt to correct a commonly held, yet faulty belief, has a by-name list with corresponding biographical data of 76 Jewish victims of the attacks.[128] Another example of the rumor's impact is evident in a 2008 WorldPublicOpinion.org poll, which found that, of 17 nations across the

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[124] Ariel Sharon was the 11th Prime Minister of Israel and served in office from March 7, 2001 to April 14, 2006.

[125] Neda Ulaby, "Amiri Baraka's Legacy Both Controversial and Achingly Beautiful, National Public Radio," January 9, 2014, http://www.npr.org/2014/01/09/261101520/amiri-baraka-poet-and-co-founder-of-black-arts-movement-dies-at-79.

[126] Robin Pomeroy and Ramin Mostafavi, "Iran's Ahmadinejad Doubts Sept. 11 Attack Toll," *Reuters*, August 7, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/08/07/us-iran-usa-ahmadinejad-idUSTRE6711EA20100807.

[127] "The 4,000 Jews Rumor," November 16, 2007, http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2005/01/20050114145729atlahtnevel0.1679041.html#axzz3bNLsLMNf.

[128] "4,000 Jews Rumor Search," accessed June 1, 2015, http://search.state.gov/search?q=4%2C000+Jews&Search.x=0&Search.y=0&Search=Search&H=&L=&D=&client=emb_en_iipdigital&output=xml_no_dtd&proxystylesheet=emb_en_iipdigital&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8&lr=lang_en&filter=0&getfields=*&Submit.x=0&Submit.y=0&ulang=en&access=p&sort=date%3AD%3AL%3Ad1&entqrm=0&entsp=a&wc=200&wc_mc=1&ud=1&exclude_apps=1&site=emb_iip_en&H=#axzz3bNM7i0tC.

Middle East polled, "majorities in only nine of them believed that al Qaeda was behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States."[129]

Whereas many factors played a part in crafting these opinions, a distinct correlation occurs with the rumor and several countries where the rumor first appeared and the persistent belief that Israel played a role in the 9/11 attacks. For example, the report states: "in Egypt, 43 percent said that Israel was behind the attacks, as did 31 percent in Jordan and 19 percent in the Palestinian Territories . . . the numbers who said al Qaeda was behind the attacks range from 11 percent in Jordan to 42 percent in the Palestinian Territories."[130] Surely such evidence, speculative as it may be, has helped to increase the conceivability and shelf life of this rumor, which has now been in circulation for fourteen years since its conception.

Building on the criteria of successful rumors developed in Chapter II, this rumor is evaluated on the following five criteria: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness.

1. Plausibility

The Zionist conspiracy rumor incorporated the criterion of plausibility by exploiting the prejudices of the target audience toward Israel. In his book, *The World Through Arab Eyes*, polling expert Shibley Telhami discusses why many Arabs hold such a perspective. Specifically, Telhami cites impossible victories by Israel over its Arab neighbors, including in the 1967 Israeli-Arab War (Six-Day War), as evidence that Israel's power is directly related to Western support.[131] Telhami further states, "as the twentieth century drew to an end, Arab frustration over Western and Israeli control in the region manifested itself in conspiracy theories."[132] Reflected by public polling of the

[129] "International Poll: No Consensus On Who Was Behind 9/11," accessed June 1, 2015, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/535.php.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Shibley Telhami, *The World through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 172.

[132] Ibid., 173.

Arab population in the Middle East, such frustration and concern have continued to manifest throughout the beginning of the twenty-first century.

As previously discussed, the Zionist conspiracy rumor was uniquely designed to capitalize on this manifestation. Several polls, conducted across the Middle East between 2005 and 2012, demonstrate the fear held by the Arab respondents for Israel, with Israel consistently being characterized as the primary security threat in the region. Such a worldview has given the Zionist conspiracy rumor plausibility, with the rumor aligning with the preconceptions of the target audience and amplifying the rumor's effectiveness.

2. Simplicity

The Zionist conspiracy rumor was simplistic in its design; it did not provide unnecessary supplementary information that could have distracted from the overall message of the rumor during propagation. Such simplicity allowed the target audience the ability to tailor the basic rumor—modifying and adding relevant details—to meet the needs of the environment. For instance, some modifiers of the Zionist conspiracy rumor added the notion that the Israeli secret service played a role in planning the attacks; others added the idea that the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon received notice of the attacks, causing him to cancel his trip to New York; still others claimed that the FBI had arrested five Israelis who were caught filming the attacks from the roof of a nearby office building.[133] Additionally, the simplicity of the rumor made it a prime candidate for dissemination via SMS and email; this observation is later elaborated upon in the section on the effects of technology.

3. Suitability

The Zionist conspiracy rumor achieved and advanced its objectives of creating and bolstering anti-Semitism around the world, by exploiting the increased global fear and sense of ambiguity as a result of the attacks. The rumor did so primarily by confirming the assumptions of the audience for Israel and its intentions, while also providing evidence that the United States was deceived. Such a deception inspired hope

[133] Curtis, "4,000 Jews, 1 Lie; Tracking and Internet Hoax."

within the target audience that the cooperative relationship between the United States and Israel had been broken and with it a principal source of suffering for the Arab people.

The Zionist conspiracy rumor also provided critical information for a period of time that was fraught with uncertainty; it circulated throughout most of the Arab world before state agencies released official reports, which were delayed by data collection and fact checking. Since the rumor first offered an explanation for the attacks to the target audience, it became difficult for such falsehoods to be corrected, even when presented with indisputable evidence to the contrary. Ultimately, it led to the continued acceptance and prevalence of the Zionist conspiracy rumor amid certain populations.

4. Vividness

The Zionist conspiracy rumor conjured an intense emotional response, based on associated prejudices of the target audience toward Israel and its speculation of Israel's intentions for overall control of the Middle East. To some members of the target audience, the rumor bolstered their conviction that Israel was the predominate threat to Middle Eastern security; while for others, it further validated their vested mistrust of Israel. The emotional provocativeness of the Zionist conspiracy rumor matched well with the psyche of the target audience, allowing for a passionate commitment to the information by the audience, furthering the diffusion of the rumor throughout social networks.

5. Suggestiveness

The Zionist conspiracy rumor also suggested future catastrophic events taking place in the Middle East. For those who believed in the rumor's authenticity, it suggested that their country might undergo attacks similar to those suffered by the United States. After all, it was reasonable to believe that if the Israelis would be willing to conduct such an attack against the United States, which had long been a great supporter of its security and advocate for its international grievances, it would do the same to unfriendly states.

6. Effect of Technology

Modern technology assisted the rapid propagation of the Zionist conspiracy rumor across several continents. For example, Bryan Curtis, a former staff writer for Slate.com, using Nexis and the Google search engine in October of 2001, conducted a review of the rumors origins and transmission via the Internet.[134] Curtis found the first publicized reference to the rumor had come from al-Manar on September 17, 2001.[135] The following day, an American website called Information Times, edited by Syad Adeeb, launched an article entitled "4,000 Jews Did Not Go to Work at WTC on Sept. 11," which credited its source to an al-Manar special report.[136] According to Curtis, "the '4,000 Jews' page [was] easily forwarded as e-mail, and this may explain the message's rapid dissemination."[137] Furthermore, while following the Hizbollah satellite news story featuring the rumor, Stephan Quinn, a media and communications expert, noted that the rumor was quickly picked up and broadcasted by local Arabic radio stations, and that his students helped further spread the rumor by way of email and SMS forwarding.[138] Speaking on the Zionist conspiracy rumor, Quinn stated, "it was picked up by English-language news agencies who reported it as a rumor. But it was re-reported as fact by Arabic radio stations who re-translated the story into Arabic and other languages."[139] Members of the target audience helped to modify the rumor by incorporating new twists into the story, and by importing their own perceptions and biases, taking advantage of the high frequency of retransmission of the rumor using several different medium types, and its movement from one language to another and then back again.[140]

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134 Curtis, "4,000 Jews, 1 Lie; Tracking and Internet Hoax."

135 Ibid.

136 Ibid. Syed Adeeb was the supposed editor of the aforementioned Information Times webpage, but the contact address and email provided for Adeeb were a hoax.

137 Curtis, "4,000 Jews, 1 Lie; Tracking and Internet Hoax."

138 Stephen Quinn, "Teaching Journalism in a Changing Islamic Nation," *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 11, article 12 (2001): 156.

139 Ibid.

140 Quinn, "Teaching Journalism in a Changing Islamic Nation," 156–157.

D. DENOUNCING ISLAMIC MARTYR NOORDIN TOP

Southeast Asia is home to myriad insurgent and terrorist organizations, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Pattani United Liberation Organization, and the Indonesian Islamic Liberation Front. However, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), the Islamic Congregation, is arguably the most influential and violent organization in the region. Since its inception in the 1970s, JI has grown to include an estimated one thousand members and has established itself as a transnational organization, now affiliated with the al-Qaeda network.[141] In its attempt to usurp governments across the region, JI has conducted a series of high profile bombings since 2000, resulting in several hundred casualties throughout Southeast Asia.[142] "JI has a jihadist vision and wants to establish an Islamist state in the region," according to global terrorism expert Amy Zalman, "encompassing Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the southern Philippines, and southern Thailand."[143]

It would be inaccurate, however, to describe JI as a monolithic organization. JI is composed of a number of individual factions led by charismatic leaders who pledged fealty to the founder of JI, Abu Bakar Bashir.[144] One such leader was Noordin Mohammed Top, who controlled JI's most aggressive faction, Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad—also known as al-Qaeda in the Malay Archipelago.[145] Noordin, once considered "the most capable and experienced bomber within the broader Jemaah Islamiyah group,"[146] is

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141 "Jemaah Islamiyah," accessed May 19 2015, http://www.cfr.org/indonesia/jemaah-islamiyah-k-jemaah-islamiah/p8948.

142 "Jemaah Islamiyah," accessed May 19 2015, http://www.trackingterrorism.org/group/jemaah-islamiyah-ji.

143 Amy Zalman, "Jemaah Islamiyah," About, accessed May 19 2015, http://terrorism.about.com/od/groupsleader1/p/Jemaah_Islamiya.htm.

144 "Jemaah Islamiyah," Council on Foreign Relations.

145 Associated Press, "Most Wanted: Southeast Asia's No. 1 Militant, Bomb-maker Noordin Mohammad Top, Still at Large," *New York Daily News*, July 20, 2009, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/wanted-southeast-asia-no-1-militant-bomb-maker-noordin-mohammad-top-large-article-1.397730.

146 James Hookway, "Bombing in Jakarta: Elusive Noordin Remains a Potent Threat," *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 2009.

believed to have played a role in every major terror attack in Indonesia over the last decade.[147]

Originally operating in his native country of Malaysia, Noordin fled to Indonesia after the September 11 attacks increased domestic pressure against militants in that country. Along with his understanding of explosives, terrorism expert James Hookway claims that Noordin brought to Indonesia his talent for persuading "Indonesians to act as suicide bombers—something not previously seen in that part of the world."[148] However, Noordin's orchestration of attacks, such as the 2002 bombing of a Bali nightclub, which killed 202 people, attracted the attention of the Indonesian authorities and made him the premier target of regional security forces.

Despite dedicating their most competent forces to the capture of Noordin, Indonesian authorities were unable to stop the terrorist leader for nearly 10 years. Noordin's ability to continue coordinating large-scale attacks in Indonesia, while simultaneously evading the police, earned him a certain celebrity status across Southeast Asia. Bernardi asserts that rumors circulated of Noordin's seemingly supernatural ability to escape apprehension, with some casting "him as a satanic figure, others as an Islamic savior."[149] Such rumors continued to spread, increasing their reach and impact with each successful act of terror, or with each failed attempt by the police to kill or capture Noordin.

On September 17, 2009, acting on a tip from a local informant, members of Indonesia's elite counter terrorism unit, Detachment 88, surrounded a house in central Java where Noordin was supposedly residing.[150] Detachment 88's attempts to breach the home were met with volleys of gunfire, resulting in a three-hour firefight between the

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[147] Hookway, "Bombing in Jakarta: Elusive Noordin Remains a Potent Threat."

[148] Ibid.

[149] Daniel Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism, and the Struggle for Strategic* Influence (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2012), 101, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10593846.

[150] Ed Davies and Olivia Rondonuwu, "U.S.-funded Detachment 88, Elite of Indonesia Security," *Reuters*, March 18, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/03/18/us-indonesia-usa-security-idUSTRE 62H13F20100318.

residents and Indonesian security forces.[151] The security forces eventually prevailed and all in the house were either killed or captured. At a news conference on the same day as the raid, Indonesia's senior police officer, General Bambang Danuri, revealed that one of those killed in the final assault had been Noordin Mohammad Top; he was identified using visual and fingerprint verification.[152]

DNA analysis confirmed the corpse of Noordin two days after the raid, with a subsequent forensic examination of the body conducted on September 30. This detailed inspection of the cadaver revealed something bewildering to the authorities; according to police spokesman Nanan Sukarna, the "forensic investigators had discovered evidence of anal trauma consistent with sodomy, a charge that would lead most consumers of this information to connect Noordin to homosexuality."[153] The forensics expert who conducted the autopsy, Dr. Munim Idris, verified at a press release that there were irregularities with Noordin's corpse; specifically Dr. Idris noted that Noordin had a funnel-shaped anus, indicating consistent trauma to the anal cavity as a result of passive sodomy.[154] What Dr. Idris failed to mention was that such a condition was more likely attributable to a congenital birth defect. As the body was quickly repatriated to Malaysia and buried according to Islamic tradition, no subsequent examinations were conducted to counter the observation of Dr. Idris.

The same day as the press release, the *Jakarta Globe* (Indonesia's most widely read newspaper) published a front-page article that sent the story viral across all sectors of Indonesian media.[155] As a followup to his statement, Dr. Idris told reporters that he was sorry he had said anything in the first place and admitted that what he had said about Noordin's condition was something that should have been kept confidential. This admitted "fault" was also heavily reported on by the media, lending further credibility to

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[151] BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, "Indonesian Police Chief Confirms Killing of Fugitive Terrorist Noordin Top," September 17, 2009.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 106.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., 108.

the story.[156] Official news coverage of Noordin's questionable sexual orientation subsided the day after the press release, in favor of other stories, such as a magnitude 7.6 earthquake off the coast of Sumatra that killed over 1,000 people.[157] However, as a result of the speculation by official news sources, rumors branding Noordin as a sexual deviant quickly spread and thrived online, where they "were received without question" by the public.[158]

Although never acknowledged as an attempt by the Indonesian government to instigate a state-sponsored whisper campaign, the two press releases by government officials, which implied, but did not explicitly declare Noordin as a sexual deviant, did just that. Bernardi contends that the initiation of the rumor, accusing Noordin of being a sodomite, "nullified his Islamist credentials in the eyes of many Muslims and rendered him a munafiq (hypocrite)" to the public.[159] Noordin's factional JI group—Tanzim Qaedat al-Jihad—floundered as a result of its leader having been portrayed as a homosexual and hypocrite. The rumor also had broader implications for the JI organization at large. Not only had the rumor robbed JI of the opportunity to portray Noordin as a pious Muslim martyr, the organization also shared the burden of Noordin's hypocrisy.[160] Bernardi summarizes, "after all, if one of its key leaders was gay, questions must be asked about the organization itself."[161]

Building on the criteria of successful rumors developed in Chapter II, this rumor is evaluated on the following five criteria: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness.

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156 Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 107.

157 "Padang Earthquake," accessed May 20 2015, http://padang-earthquake.blogspot.com/.

158 Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 116.

159 Ibid., 107.

160 Ibid., 122.

161 Ibid.

1. Plausibility

The rumor regarding Noordin's supposed sexual proclivity was plausible for three reasons. First, the audience had no reason to question such revealing information about the elusive terrorist. Little was known about Noordin's personal life other than his having emigrated from Malaysia, which in itself made Noordin's character suspect to a xenophobic Indonesian public. Second, the initial statement, very publicly made by Dr. Idris, followed by his lamentation at revealing such intimate details regarding the autopsy, "gave the information an official, truthful appearance" as Bernardi observes.[162] Finally, if Noordin was such a dangerous criminal, it was unlikely that anyone could forcibly sodomize him over a prolonged period; Noordin would have to have been a willing participant in the act.[163]

2. Simplicity

The rumor was initiated and propagated as a result of a very simple, but authoritative observation. In this case, a medical expert whose opinion was categorically trusted by the public commented that the condition of Noordin's rectum was consistent with someone who had been passively sodomized over an extended period of time. This observation, communicated only twice by Indonesian authorities to the public, was not unnecessarily burdened with reinforcing details. The rumor spread, therefore, because the meaning of the forensic examiner's observation could not be misconstrued or readily explained away.

3. Suitability

The initiation of the rumor was well suited to achieve the objective of posthumously discrediting Noordin, and the wider JI organization, as it played on three converging contexts of Indonesian culture: sexuality, religion, and nationality.[164] First, such a rumor mobilized prevailing Indonesian stereotypes, which characterize

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[162] Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 104.

[163] Ibid., 106.

[164] Ibid., 115.

homosexuals as being failed citizens, criminals, and mentally unstable.[165] Bernardi also notes that the rumor invalidated Noordin's cult of personality, "as accusations of passive sodomy emasculate the hyper-masculine terrorist."[166]

Second, the rumor suggested a lifestyle that was counter to the tenets of Islam, a faith with which approximately 90 percent of Indonesians identify. Bernardi claims that the implications of the rumor were "particularly damning and discrediting to the legacy of Noordin Top, an Islamist extremist who supposedly adhered to a very strict—and homophobic—interpretation of Islam."[167] As the rumor took hold, it undermined any moral justification for the attacks orchestrated by Noordin in the name of his faith.

Third, the rumor took advantage of Noordin's status as an outsider as a Malaysian. The prevailing Indonesian prejudice promoted the rumor, which characterizes Malaysians as being backward, immoral, and jealous of Indonesian society.[168] Taken together, Bernardi claims that, "the state mobilized stereotypes of homosexuality, national antagonism with Malaysia, and the cathectic anxiety over anal sex in order to undermine the Islamist extremist narrative associated with ones of its heroes."[169]

4. Vividness

The rumor about Noordin's sexual deviance was unquestionably vivid. It evoked a moral reaction from the Indonesian public, which deems homosexuality as taboo and counter to the tenets of Islam. The notion that this once-perceived formidable foe of the government had actually been nothing more than a perverted reprobate was a titillating topic of discussion. While alive, Noordin was feared for his ability to conduct attacks at will, supernaturally evading any attempts by the Indonesian authorities to arrest him. After his death, the public's fear of Noordin was transformed into mockery and contempt.

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[165] Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines,* 114.

[166] Ibid., 115.

[167] Ibid., 114.

[168] Ibid., 127.

[169] Ibid., 115.

5. Suggestiveness

Even though Dr. Idris did not explicitly state that he thought Noordin was homosexual, his mentioning of Noordin's funnel-shaped anus during the press release certainly implied Noordin's homosexuality. The audience was left to make the connection between the irregularities noted by the forensic examiner and Noordin's supposed sexual proclivity. However, this logical leap was not difficult for the generally homophobic public to make.[170]

6. Effect of Technology

The transmediation of the Noordin Top story from the official to the unofficial news sources of Internet-based social networks gave the rumor its excessive reach and impact. Online postings about Noordin's condition began the day after the autopsy report was released, with unofficial blog sites reposting the original news stories with new commentary.[171] Such speculation through posting and reposting of the rumor contributed to Noordin Top having been the most searched term through Indonesian search engines in 2009.[172]

The nature of the rumor was well suited to online parody and crude jokes. Images, text, and video were manipulated from their original news sources, as Indonesian Internet prosumers—those producing as well as consuming content—began portraying Noordin as various effeminate caricatures of himself. Postings were made to blogsites, online forums, and video sharing websites, such as YouTube. Originally, such content was primarily aimed at attacking Noordin and the JI network by denouncing their hypocrisy; however, the attacks later devolved into the denouncement of Malaysians in general, Noordin having been Malaysian by birth. The latent conflict between Malaysians and Indonesians would help sustain and cement the rumor of Noordin's supposed sexual deviancy as truth. The Noordin Top rumor helps to demonstrate the contention of

[170] Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 107.

[171] Ibid., 116.

[172] Ibid.

Bernardi that "the online news cycle . . . endlessly circulates and repositions the news in multiple forums and format, which is what makes it an ideal platform for a whisper campaign."[173]

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter analyzed three cases where rumors were employed successfully to validate the criteria for effective rumor employment proposed in Chapter II. All three cases satisfied the criteria of plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness. In two of the cases—the Zionist conspiracy rumor and the Noordin Mohammad Top rumor—technology also played a crucial role in amplifying the reach and impact of the rumors. Although there may be cases of successful rumor employment where not all of the proposed criteria are obviously evident, the criteria must be satisfied to some degree, and the criteria must not conflict with one another, if a rumor is to promulgate. In cases in which the proposed criteria are not satisfied, or where the criteria conflict, a rumor will not become self-propelling or will become unrecognizably distorted from its original form to satisfy the criteria minimally before transmission takes place.

The next chapter analyzes three cases that demonstrate the principles of rumor defense—seeking to tamp down rumors preventively, or to neutralize those that cannot be prevented—as proposed in Chapter II. The cases chosen for analysis include instances of where a rumor was, and was not successfully defended against; such a selection of cases also demonstrates the ramifications for an organization when it fails to defend against rumors successfully.

[173] Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 108.

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IV. TESTING THE PRINCIPLES OF RUMOR DEFENSE: THE REALMS OF POLITICS, BUSINESS, AND WAR

A. INTRODUCTION

Influence practitioners must be prepared to defend against rumors because of their ability to influence populations directly. As an information operations tool, rumors are able to subvert, deceive, and to suggest what *truth* is to a population. Left unaddressed, a well-crafted rumor can quickly spread and can have a lasting effect on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of a given target audience.

Chapter II offered a set of general guidelines to abide by when defending against rumors that included being prepared to deal with rumors; taking prompt action once a rumor is identified; staying on message during refutation; controlling the narrative; minimizing misunderstanding; and taking responsibility for the truth. From these guidelines, Chapter II proposed two sets of criteria for rumor defense. The first set focused on preventing rumor generation, and included the reducing of environmental anxiety and uncertainty, as well as limiting the means of rumor dissemination. The second set focused on neutralizing rumors in circulation, and included ignoring impotent rumors, commenting on plausible rumors, confirming the truth, and refuting effectively.

To test the proposed criteria for rumor defense, this chapter analyzes three cases in which rumors were employed to discredit an individual or organization, and the subsequent efforts by the target to defend against these rumors. Of the cases analyzed, two demonstrate successful attempts at rumor negation and one demonstrates an unsuccessful attempt to defend against rumors. Initially, each case is described in detail to provide context for discussion, followed by a critique of the defenders' efforts. The first case centers on the attempted use of rumor by political opponents to defame Franklin Delano Roosevelt leading up to the 1932 presidential election. The second case focuses on the attempted use of rumor by Chinese protestors to initiate a boycott of the French retailer Carrefour, in response to a perceived insult directed at China, in the lead up to the Beijing Olympics. The third case traces the use of rumor by insurgents to subvert an information operations campaign by coalition forces in war-torn Iraq. These particular

cases were chosen because they provide historical and modern accounts; they demonstrate a mixture of success and failure in defending against rumors; and the rumors featured in each case satisfy the criteria for the effective employment of rumors described in the previous chapter, thus, reinforcing this previous concept.

Overall, the chapter finds that, in addition to validating the proposed criteria for rumor defense, these case studies reveal that successfully defending against rumors requires exercising a mixture of both proactive and reactive measures effectively. These cases also provide six cautionary lessons for organizations failing to defend against rumors: First, when an organization or individual does not conduct methodical scanning of the information environment for conditions favoring rumor generation, it becomes susceptible to being blindsided by a particularly impactful rumor. Second, if the organization or individual does not act transparently, ethically, and responsibly in public, the information environment becomes more favorable to rumor generation. Third, if the organization or individual is unable to eliminate known sources of rumor, or fails to restrict those mediums or channels through which rumors propagate, rumor circulation and dispersion will occur more rapidly and broadly. Fourth, if the organization or individual ignores plausible rumors altogether, it partly cedes the information environment to the adversary, becoming increasingly vulnerable to future rumors. Fifth, if the organization or individual fails to address those details of rumors that are true, separating such truths from falsehoods at a later time becomes more difficult. Finally, time is of the essence: rumors left to fester are more difficult to counteract once they have taken root in the psyche of the target audience.

B. WHISPERS AGAINST FDR IN 1932

Prior to winning four consecutive bids for the U.S. presidency, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) had to overcome a debilitating illness beginning in the summer of 1921, which threatened to turn public attention away from his New Deal initiative and toward concerns over the fragility of his health. While rumors concerning his health would continue to plague the president throughout the latter years of his political career, Roosevelt strove to prevent and neutralize such rumors during his second run for the

White House in 1932. This study examines rumors surrounding Roosevelt's health in the political landscape of the 1932 presidential elections, and cites the proactive and reactive measures he and his public relations team took to defend against politically motivated whispers.

In August 1921, Roosevelt, then the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, took a much-deserved vacation to his family's summer cabin on Campobello Island in New Brunswick.[174] On August 10, following the day's activities—which had included sailing and swimming with his three older children, Anna, James, and Elliot—Roosevelt was suddenly overcome by fatigue, and began complaining to his wife of intense lower back pain.[175] By the following morning, Roosevelt maintained a temperature of 102 degrees Fahrenheit and had lost the ability to move his legs.[176] Roosevelt's condition continued to worsen until August 25, at which time, the family physician diagnosed him with infantile paralysis, known more commonly as polio.[177] The diagnosis marked the beginning of a long and arduous recovery process; however, by early winter, Roosevelt had already regained some upper body strength and his nervous system showed initial signs of recovery.[178] After several years of rehabilitation at his home in Hyde Park, the disabled Roosevelt returned to the political stage and won election as the 44th Governor of New York in 1929.[179] Roosevelt's ill health scarcely affected his election to office, due in part to the masterful way in which his public relations team played down the severity of his disability, and because of an increased documentation of polio cases affecting older children, adolescents, and adults during the 1920s.[180]

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[174] Amy Berish, "FDR and Polio," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, accessed August 8, 2015, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/polio.html.

[175] Roosevelt Institute, "Polio Strikes: August 1921," accessed August 8, 2015, http://roosevelt institute.org/policy-and-ideasroosevelt-historyfdr/polio-strikes.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Berish, "FDR and Polio."

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society, "Polio," Faqs.orq, accessed August 8, 2015, http://www.faqs.org/childhood/Pa-Re/Polio.html.

However, once news had spread of his intent to run for office in the 1932 presidential election, the public did not look favorably upon Roosevelt as rumors began to emerge, which called into question his ability to lead the country due to physical and mental limitations associated with his disability. Biographers Houck and Kiewe describe, "Letters, many anonymous, spread throughout the country, some even suggesting that Roosevelt was incapable of governing not because of his polio or even from a paralytic stroke, but because he suffered from syphilis."[181] Such anonymous content was fueled in part by public statements made by other political figures aimed at discrediting Roosevelt. Jesse E. Nicolson, the president of the National Woman's Democratic Law Enforcement League at the time, wrote in *Time* magazine, "This candidate, while mentally qualified for the presidency, is entirely unfit physically."[182] As the rumors continued to intensify, Roosevelt and his public relations team knew they needed to act before the rhetoric concerning his disability grew more rampant, to the point it could not be repudiated. Such concern was valid because public perceptions regarding disabilities at the time were not as they are today. According to Hugh Gallagher, a disability advocate, during that time period, "to be handicapped in some visible way carried with it social opprobrium. The handicapped were kept at home, out of sight, in back bedrooms, by families who felt a mixture of embarrassment and shame about their presence."[183] Thus, Roosevelt had to act before his campaign was hijacked by ignorance and magniloquence.

In response to the burgeoning rumors, Roosevelt turned to his long-time confidant and public relations expert, Louis Howe, to help develop a multipronged counter-rumor campaign. The first measure taken by Howe was to release a public statement that a $500,000 life insurance policy had been granted to Roosevelt.[184] As an accompaniment to this news, "Dr. E.W. Beckwith, the medical director of the Equitable Life Assurance

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[181] Davis W. Houck and Amos Kiewe, *FDR's Body of Politics: The Rhetoric of Disability* (Presidential Rhetoric and Political Communication) (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 65.

[182] Time, "Prohibition: N.W.D.L.E.L. v. W.O.F.N.P.R.," April 27, 1931, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,741484,00.html.

[183] Hugh Gregory Gallagher, *FDR's Splendid Deception: The Moving Story of Roosevelt's Massive Disability-And the Intense Efforts to Conceal It from the Public* (Saint Petersburg, FL: Vandamere Press, 1999), 29.

[184] Houck and Kiewe, *FDR's Body of Politics*, 55.

Company, also issued a very public report testifying to Roosevelt's excellent health—both moral and physical."[185] The press subsequently interviewed Roosevelt and Dr. Beckwith in late 1930 and both attested to Roosevelt's strong physical condition. The goal and the result of this measure were to decrease the anxiety surrounding the presidential hopeful's upcoming campaign, by leveraging an authoritative and credible source as spokesperson. The medical report and subsequent public statement of Dr. Beckwith helped prevent the spread of additional rumors, while also forming a foundation of truth for reference as Roosevelt and his public relations team attempted to negate rumors concerning his health as the election primaries approached.

Assisting with the refutation of the rumors regarding Roosevelt's health, Earl Looker, a childhood friend and public relations specialist, wrote an article that emphasized Roosevelt's physical fitness.[186] Looker's article was first published on July 25, 1931, in *Liberty Magazine*, with advanced copies being distributed by Howe to leaders in the Democratic Party and any news correspondent who had conveyed skepticism of Roosevelt's ability to lead due to the state of his health.[187] Jim Farley, Roosevelt's campaign manager, took the article written by Looker and thrust it into national distribution.[188] The article not only refuted the rumors, but also maintained open dialogue with the public and conveyed themes for their countering.

Despite such efforts, with the primaries drawing to a close, the rumors regarding Roosevelt were still gaining traction among certain segments of the American public. "The *New York Times* reported, 'that a whisper campaign about [Roosevelt's] physical condition was being spread throughout the Middle West in an effort to head off his

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[185] Houck and Kiewe, *FDR's Body of Politics*, 55, originally cited from "Newspaper Interview on Governor Roosevelt Accepting Delivery of $500,000 Life Insurance Policy in Favor of Georgia Warm Springs Foundation," Albany, N.Y., October 18, 1930, Family, Business, and Personal Papers, Box 42, FDR Papers, FRPL.

[186] James G. Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, *Reginald Earle Looker Papers*, Atlanta History Center, accessed August 8, 2015, http://ahc.galileo.usg.edu/ahc/view?docId=ead/ahc.MSS691f-ead.xml;query=;brand=default.

[187] Houck and Kiewe, *FDR's Body of Politics*, 67.

[188] Ibid.

nomination by the Democrats in Chicago.'"[189] Such news led Roosevelt to commit to an undertaking that would provide proof of his good health and vigor. In the event that Roosevelt won the 1932 Democratic nomination, he planned to fly to Chicago to receive the nomination in person. Houck and Kiewe note, "Such an embodied acceptance was not part of party tradition. Prior to 1932, the winning candidate would only be 'informed' of the nomination several weeks after the convention had concluded."[190] In July 1932, Roosevelt followed through with his plan and walked into the convention hall to address the crowd using an approach that obstructed the onlookers from seeing his lower extremities.[191] His appearance in person and delivery of a speech laced with references to his strong physical condition and fortitude provoked a whirlwind of articles and editorials that described him as a strong and fit fighter, and confirmed him as a promising leader for the American people.[192] This action continued to reinforce the notion that the rumors surrounding his health were false.

Roosevelt and his team also worked diligently to restrict the mediums and channels of the rumors, best exemplified by the constant efforts of Looker to cajole the press, preventing them from commenting on or publishing photos depicting the limited use of Roosevelt's legs. By his own effort, Looker was able to "encourage the press to respect Roosevelt's disability and treat it as a private matter and not a public one and to encourage the press to report accurately on Roosevelt's physical fitness—as long as such accuracy was in line with Looker's description."[193] This gentleman's agreement held throughout the presidential candidacy and shattered any possibilities for the poor-health-naysayers to acquire written descriptions or provocative images that could be used as corroborating evidence for the rumors; thus, Looker effectively limited sources that could be used to fuel the rumors.

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[189] Ibid., 83.

[190] Houck and Kiewe, *FDR's Body of Politics*, 83.

[191] Ibid., 86.

[192] Ibid., 85–92.

[193] Ibid., 74–75.

Resulting from a late onset of polio, Roosevelt did indeed suffer physical limitations in the ability to use his legs; knowing this, Roosevelt's competitors and critics took the opportunity to emphasize these limitations—as well as other unsubstantiated claims of his diminished mental capabilities—to encourage the spread of rumors which called into question his ability to effectively lead the country. To quell such rumors, Roosevelt and his public relations team embarked on a multi-faceted counter-rumor campaign that incorporated a mixture of both proactive and reactive measures, captured in the criteria for the defense against rumors. To prevent the spread of rumors, Roosevelt and his team reduced environmental anxiety and uncertainty by providing the American public with positive images and favorable assessments of his health and vigor; conversely, they limited the distribution of damaging images and stories by the media, which reported otherwise.

As part of the counter-rumor campaign, Roosevelt and his team also sought to neutralize rumors already in circulation. The team did not comment on rumors that were particularly too fantastic—such as the rumor about Roosevelt having contracted syphilis—as they did not want to lend greater credibility to such rumors. The team did, however, comment on the more plausible rumors regarding Roosevelt's health and he conducted public appearances to prove such rumors false. The team was able to refute the rumors effectively by maintaining open dialogue with the public, by providing venues for supplementary information, sources of truth, and by relying on outside authorities to speak on Roosevelt's behalf. These efforts successfully recast Roosevelt as a healthy and vigorous candidate. Roosevelt would go on to serve four terms in office—the most of any American president.

C. TALKING ABOUT CARREFOUR IN CHINA

In 2001, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that China would host the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. While the Chinese celebrated the announcement with fireworks and an outburst of nationalism, many human rights groups denounced the

decision because of China's record of human rights abuses.[194] This prompted François Carrard, the executive director of the IOC, to make the following statement reaffirming the committee's decision:

> Some people say, because of serious human rights issues, we close the door and say no… The other way is to bet on openness. Bet on the fact that in the coming seven years, openness, progress and development in many areas will be such that the situation will be improved. We are taking the bet that seven years from now we will see many changes.[195]

However, for France and China, the issue did not end there. After a multitude of protests over China's treatment of Tibet—which occurred as the 2008 Olympic Torch made the 85,000-mile journey from Greece to China—Chinese citizens began to rally around a rumor resulting from some rather intense protests in Paris.[196] As part of the Chinese citizens' response, they took action against the French retail giant, Carrefour.

The Olympic Torch's 129-day trip—named the "Journey of Harmony"—met stiff protests in the United States, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the U.K.[197] Communications expert Timothy Coombs claims, "most protesters were pro-Tibet and were upset by China's treatment of Tibet, while other protestors were using the Olympics as a chance to feature China's poor human rights record."[198] The crisis escalated as the torch reached France. On April 7, 2008—the first day of the Paris leg—pro-Tibet protesters waved flags, threw eggs, and chanted "free Tibet" and "shame the games" as the athletes jogged past, forcing security personnel to extinguish the Olympic flame three

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[194] Jere Longman, "Olympics; Beijing Wins Bid for 2008 Olympic Games," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2001, http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/14/sports/olympics-beijing-wins-bid-for-2008-olympic-games.html.

[195] Longman, "Olympics; Beijing Wins Bid for 2008 Olympic Games."

[196] Peter Walker, David Batty, and agencies, *Olympic Torch Relay Cut Short Amid Paris Protests*, theguardian.com, April 7, 2008, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/07/france.olympicgames 2008.

[197] Timothy Coombs, "Olympic Torch Protests in France, Reactions in China: Carrefour Learns about International Crises," in *Case Studies in Crisis Communication: International Perspectives on Hits and Misses*, ed. Amiso M. George and Cornelius B. Pratt (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), 152.

[198] Ibid.

times in an effort to curb the unrest.[199] This discontent forced officials to transport the torch by vehicle during portions of the route and subsequently cut short the Paris leg of the relay.[200] As news of the events reached the Chinese in their home country, pictures surfaced of Jin Jing, a Chinese a paraplegic athlete, being threatened by protesters as she carried the torch in France. The news and the pictures of Jin Jing sparked immediate retaliation against the French Embassy and French businesses across China. Carrefour, which had 112 hypermarkets in China at the time—far more than any other foreign retailer including Wal-Mart—was the hardest hit by the backlash.[201]

Although Carrefour had no direct association to the events that occurred in Paris, the company did have a strong presence in China and had become a symbol of France; therefore, it became the most visible target for Chinese retaliation.[202] Chinese protestors started to organize boycotts and demonstrations against Carrefour, along with other French-based companies, via an online campaign.[203] The rumor, although unfounded, stated that the major shareholder to the company had donated money to the Dalai Lama; thus, the company was seen as supporting Tibetan independence.[204] This rumor posed a tremendous threat to the Carrefour Corporation and its stake in China's large and lucrative market. As the rumor-powered boycotts took hold, Coombs notes that Carrefour's "May 1st holiday sales were estimated to be 10 percent below the previous year."[205] Left untreated, the spreading rumor threatened Carrefour's already fragile image in China and would continue to undercut company revenues.[206]

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[199] Henry Samuel, "Olympic Torch Extinguished Three Times," Telegraph.co.uk, April 7, 2008, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1584227/Olympic-torch-extinguished-three-times.html.

[200] "Protests Cut Short Olympic Relay," April 7, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7334545.stm.

[201] Forbes.com Staff, "Carrefour CEO Denies Backing Dalai Lama," Forbes.com, April, 19, 2008, http://www.forbes.com/2008/04/19/carrefour-china-duran-face-markets-cx_pm_0419autofacescan01.html.

[202] Coombs, "Olympic Torch Protests in France, Reactions in China," 153.

[203] Forbes.com Staff, "Carrefour CEO Denies Backing Dalai Lama."

[204] Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China's Foreign Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 241.

[205] Coombs, "Olympic Torch Protests in France, Reactions in China," 157.

[206] Ibid.

As the rumor circulated throughout Chinese cyberspace and began to intensify, Carrefour published several statements intended to limit the anxiety of the Chinese public and to refute the rumor with the truth. To limit anxiety, Carrefour's chairman, Jose Luis Duran, released the following statement in an attempt to separate the company from the Paris incidents:

> Obviously, recent sabotage incidents in Paris during the Olympic Torch relay hurt the feeling of the Chinese people, made them angry and triggered their protests. I hope that the preparations for the Olympics will be implemented with a harmonious atmosphere. The success of the Beijing Olympics will benefit all the people.[207]

In this statement, Duran chose to comment on the incident that sparked the creation of the rumor, the French Olympic Torch protests. In doing so, he expressed empathy for the underlying Chinese grievances and attempted to separate his company from the incident. After appealing to the concerns of the Chinese protestor, Duran went on to address the rumor directly by stating that, "these allegations are groundless. Carrefour and its branches have given no direct or indirect support to any political or religious group."[208] By issuing such statements, Duran confirmed the truth (Carrefour does not and will not support political and religious groups), while denying falsehoods associated with a rumor (the allegations are groundless); thus, while helping to build his corporation's reputation for transparency, and fostering a trusting relationship with the public, Duran also increased the chances that the audience would be receptive to his anti-rumor message by first recognizing and separating Carrefour from the Paris Olympic Torch debacle, the true reason for the audience's concerns,. Furthermore, his position within the company made Duran an authoritative source on donations and monetary disbursements of the company and its stakeholders.

Working on behalf of Carrefour, the French government also provided assistance by applying political pressure on the Chinese government to take a more active role in curtailing the spread of the rumor. Such cooperation resulted from the French having sent

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[207] Xinhua, "Carrefour Chairman: Carrefour Supports Beijing Olympics," chinaview.cn, April 23, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/23/content_8034795.htm.

[208] Ibid.

a special envoy to Beijing, intent on restoring bilateral relations between the two nations. The envoy emphasized France's desire to restore the image of its leading retailer, which was a major distributer of Chinese products abroad. The economic pressure realized by a threat to reduce the distribution of Chinese goods encouraged the Chinese government to block Internet sites that had been spreading the rumor.[209] This action did not directly refute the rumor, but it did satisfy two criteria of rumor defense. First, the act eliminated known sources of the rumor by preventing access by large portions of the Chinese population. Second, the act sent a clear message from the government to the protesters themselves to stop boycotting and facilitating the spread of the rumor. Such an action demonstrates how an authoritative and credible third party can effectively curtail the spread of a rumor.

This case illustrates how a corporation used elements of the criteria for rumor defense to stop the spread of a rumor that was both fiscally costly and damaging to its public image. The case provides an appreciation of how to combat rumors by addressing underlying grievances to reduce anxiety, by promoting transparency in the refutation of rumors, by using an authoritative source as spokesman, and incorporating third party actors in the defense.

D. THE TRIANGLE OF DEATH: U.S. FORCES IN IRAQ

From 2003 to 2011, the challenge facing Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), the military command overseeing coalition forces in the country, was daunting. After toppling Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003, MNF-I inherited the responsibility of facilitating the rebuilding and governing of a country that had had its infrastructure decimated, its governmental services disrupted, and its population embittered as a result of the conflict. Even under ideal conditions—with an inundation of resources, an indigenous and legitimate governing body leading the effort, and a compliant and supportive population—the complete resuscitation of a nation following war is a monumental undertaking; however, the conditions in Iraq were far from ideal. MNF-I

[209] Yanqi Tong and Shaohua Lei, *Social Protest in Contemporary China, 2003–2010: Transitional Pains and Regime Legitimacy* (China Policy Series) (New York: Routledge, 2013), 132–133.

was wholly unprepared to fix what it had broken, and what Saddam himself had already neglected through 30 years of dictatorship and over 10 years of international sanctions; in short, the resources to establish law and order, to restore essential services, and to provide adequate humanitarian aid were greatly atrophied.[210] The Iraqi Interim Government, established in June 2004, was neither seen as legitimate by the civilian population, nor effective at carrying out its duties.[211] Whereas coalition forces were first greeted with jubilation by the Iraqi people for having ousted Saddam, such positive sentiment eventually began giving way to disillusionment over the lack of noticeable reconstruction efforts and a growing perception of foreign occupation.

It was in this contentious environment of uncertainty and fear that the insurgency in Iraq was born. In its earliest stages, foreign jihadists, Ba'ath Party loyalists, and disgruntled Iraqi soldiers made up the Sunni insurgency; however, insurgent ranks increasingly grew to include Iraqi citizens who were either initially sympathetic to the coalition or, at the very least, previously uncommitted. One of the keys to winning the Iraqi population to either side was the control of the information environment, something coalition forces initially failed to grasp, but which the insurgents were keenly aware of. In other words, whichever side could command the loyalty of the population, while conversely denying such loyalty to its opponent, would be victorious in the struggle. Managing information and rumors was critical to winning the support and loyalty of the population.

MNF-I needed to pursue a comprehensive information operations campaign—something that was initially lacking in the overall coalition strategy—directed at engaging key segments of the Iraqi population; the coalition also needed to make an aggressive effort to challenge enemy propaganda by responding rapidly with counter messages, something that it rarely did effectively.[212] Four years into the insurgency,

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[210] The University of Pittsburg, "Iraq Was a Failed State at Start of 2003 War," October 17, 2007, http://www.news.pitt.edu/news/iraq-was-failed-state-start-2003-war-says-pitt-professor-failure-provide-humanitarian-aid-has-c.

[211] Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (City of Westminster, London: Penguin, 2006), 81.

[212] Andrew Garfield, "The U.S. Counter-propaganda Failure in Iraq," *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2007, http://www.meforum.org/1753/the-us-counter-propaganda-failure-in-iraq.

Andrew Garfield, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and strategic communication consultant, observed, "while the coalition fumbles with its information operations, the insurgents and militia groups are adept at releasing timely messages to undermine support for the Iraqi government and bolster their own perceived potency."[213] Garfield cited the slowness of the coalition's approval process for information operations products as a hindrance, which "creates an information vacuum that Iraqis fill with conspiracy theories and gossip often reflecting the exaggerations or outright lies of [the] insurgents."[214] As the insurgents maintained the information initiative by producing timely messages, disseminated at the grass roots level by word of mouth, competing organizations within MNF-I saturated the airwaves and print media with conflicting messages long after their period of relevancy had passed.[215] MNF-I needed to think strategically but act quickly at the local level; failing to do so, the coalition often surrendered the information environment to the insurgents.

A pointed example of the insurgents' ability to trump the information operations of coalition forces occurred in the so-called "Triangle of Death" in early 2005. Just south of Baghdad, this agricultural area remained one of the most restive regions in Iraq, where Sunni insurgents operated with impunity, attacking coalition forces and coopting support from the local population.[216] In an attempt to wrest control of the area away from the insurgents, American civil affairs teams began to inoculate livestock as part of a larger information operations campaign in support of MNF-I efforts to counteract insurgent activities.[217] The campaign was, however, short-lived; insurgents spread a rumor throughout the local population that the Americans were not in fact vaccinating their livestock, but were poisoning the herds. Bernardi summarizes the impact of this rumor:

> For farmers already wary of the U.S. and coalition presence, wracked by fear of societal and political instability, and suffering livestock losses to

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213 Ibid.

214 Garfield, "The U.S. Counter-propaganda Failure in Iraq."

215 Ibid.

216 Anthony Shadid, "Iraq's Forbidding 'Triangle of Death,'" *The Washington Post*, November 23, 2004, A01.

217 Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 74.

> disease and a rapidly dwindling water supply, the bovine poisoning rumor explained the deaths of the herds, predicted future loss and gloom, and linked the cause of their current woes to the U.S. invasion and occupation. It provided a target for pent-up frustration, anxiety, and fear that led some farmers to turn a blind eye to insurgent activities and others to participate in violence. MNF-I's information operation and civil affairs mission backfired. The insurgents gained narrative ground at a crucial juncture in the war effort.[218]

Even though the bovine poisoning rumor itself posed a challenge to coalition forces operating in the area, its impact was magnified by its integration with three other rumors in circulation at the time: that American helicopters were causing an increase in damaging sandstorms; that the presence of American forces was contributing to a severe drought by consuming precious water reserves; and that American forces came to Iraq to steal the nation's oil.[219] Once identified, these rumors were often dismissed by coalition forces as being too fantastic, and not something to be addressed seriously, though, in retrospect, they should have been confronted. The rumors' net effect was to counteract an information operations campaign and to channel more local support to the insurgents.

Bernardi notes that this case demonstrates how "otherwise diverse rumors [can] cluster around and end up advancing narratives that are widely understood by a specific community."[220] Left unchallenged, these rumors supported an insurgent narrative that the Americans intended to decimate the Iraqi population so that they could fleece Iraq of its natural resources. Bernardi further asserts that such rumors ended up "portraying American forces and interests as an existential threat to the people the United States is trying to protect and to the host nation it supports. Thus, these rumors contribute to a point of view that the Americans and the cooperating government of Iraq, not the insurgents, are the enemies that the people must defeat."[221]

In this case, the target of the rumor failed to employ either proactive or reactive measures to defend MNF-I actions and subsequently suffered the damaging consequences

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[218] Ibid.

[219] Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 74.

[220] Ibid., 76.

[221] Ibid., 87.

of inaction. MNF-I made no concerted effort to prevent rumor generation in the first place, although arguably it had limited options for doing so. Environmental anxiety and uncertainty are natural byproducts of war, giving the insurgents' fertile ground to sow rumors among the local population.

Anticipating these conditions, coalition forces should have made every effort to reduce the population's apprehension by maintaining regular and open dialogue with the local communities about their fears, by expanding public access to institutional media to inform a wider audience about changing environmental conditions, and by demonstrating efforts to counteract the effects of the ongoing drought. Being as transparent as possible, by providing explanations for their actions—such as informing the population about the need for the inoculation project in advance—would also have helped to reduce the locals' uncertainty. As Bernardi suggests, the best way to combat rumors in a conflict environment is to "saturate contested terrains with accurate and timely information," which can "serve as obstacles to the flow of rumors that occur in information vacuums."[222] Coalition forces were also limited in their options for reducing the spread of the rumors, as they were being promulgated by word of mouth via multiple sources—a primary provocateur could not be identified.[223] Even so, efforts should have been made to categorize and track the rumors to better understand how they were spread and their patterns of trans-mediation for future neutralization.

Once coalition forces identified that such rumors were in circulation, they should have made every effort to dispel the rumors with truth whenever they were encountered; however, as previously noted, at the time commanders thought the rumors too fantastic to be taken seriously. Seemingly, coalition forces were correctly adhering to the first criterion of rumor neutralization—ignoring impotent rumors—but they failed to assess the rumors from the perspective of the local Iraqi population, and instead judged them from their own perspective. Bernardi surmises that, to the locals "the explanation implicit in the bovine poisoning and associated rumors was plausible and even rational."[224] These

[222] Bernardi, *Narrative Landmines*, 85.

[223] Ibid.

[224] Ibid., 74.

rumors made sense to the Iraqis because of their heightened concern for safety and future access to resources, and because "official and trustworthy communication keeping the population informed about government progress was inconsistent to non-existent."[225] By the time coalition forces realized that the rumors were indeed something to be taken seriously, there was no real opportunity to counteract them. The rumors had been allowed to comingle with the truth for so long that they had become entrenched in the local psyche as fact—something less and less likely to be dispelled with the passage of time.

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter analyzed two cases of successful rumor negation and one unsuccessful attempt to defend against rumors. The first case, centered on the attempted defamation of Franklin Delano Roosevelt by political opponents, demonstrated a successful defense against rumor with the employment of both proactive and reactive measures. Roosevelt and his public relations team effectively leveraged interviews, print media, negotiations, and public appearances to reduce environmental anxiety and uncertainty and limited the means of rumor dissemination; additionally, they ignored impotent rumors, commented on plausible rumors, confirmed the truth, and refuted the allegations effectively.

The second case, which centered on the attempted attack of the French retailer Carrefour by Chinese protesters, demonstrated a partially successful defense against rumor with the employment of reactive measures. Carrefour, with the help of the French and Chinese governments, developed an anti-rumor strategy that reduced environmental anxiety and uncertainty and limited the means of rumor dissemination; they also effectively neutralized rumors in circulation by confirming the truth and by refuting plausible rumors effectively. The third case, which focused on the use of rumor by insurgents to subvert an information operations campaign in Iraq, demonstrated an unsuccessful defense against rumor with the failure by the target to employ any measures effectively.

[225] Ibid., 75.

While none of the selected cases by itself has demonstrated all the proposed criteria for rumor defense, when taken together, the cases do support their validation. However, further research is warranted to confirm this initial validation. In addition to validating the criteria for rumor defense, the analysis also yielded cautionary lessons for failing to adhere to the criteria, demonstrating the negative results of such a deviation. These lessons emphasized the need for an organization to conduct methodical scanning of the information environment for conditions favoring rumor generation; to act transparently, ethically, and responsibly in public; eliminate known sources of rumor by restricting those mediums or channels through which rumors propagate; consider rumors from the perspective of the target audience, taking seriously those rumors which are plausible to the target audience; address those details of rumors which are true; and act quickly, as rumors left to fester are more difficult to counteract once they have taken root in the psyche of the target audience.

In the next chapter, two new models are introduced to assist the influence practitioner with the employment of, and defense against, rumors. These models are based upon conclusions drawn after assessing the academic literature on the subject of rumors, and the review and recognition of a gap in current U.S. military doctrine. The chapter then concludes with a recapitulation of the major themes of this study, emphasizing those principles of rumor employment and defense to be incorporated into the future doctrine and training of psychological operations forces.

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V. FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

A. INTRODUCTION

Currently, many of the United States' competitors embrace and employ rumors as part of their overall information operations campaigns. For example, the Russians created the Internet Research Agency (IRA), whose primary mission is to seed rumors both domestically and internationally. The IRA has fielded topics ranging from attacks on Putin's political opponents to fake reports of Ebola. In December 2014, Russia spread a rumor purporting the death of an unarmed African American woman at the hands of police officers in the United States, presumably to increase tension in the areas affected by the Ferguson, Missouri, protests.[226] Countries like Russia are perfecting their skills and are quickly learning how to craft effective and relevant rumors that have a lasting impact. Therefore, it is critical that the United States reexamines its information operations doctrine and incorporates unique tools to combat these emerging threats, as well as develop its own rumor capability.

As demonstrated in this thesis, rumors were effective tools of influence ranging from rumor propagation to help deter Germans in World War II, to affecting the beliefs and actions of everyday citizens participating in social movements in the digital information age. However, despite the demonstrated effectiveness of rumors as a tool of influence, the U.S. military has largely forgotten this skill and effectively propagating and countering rumors has all but disappeared from its doctrine and training. This failure to educate the U.S. military and PSYOP community in particular has hindered the use of rumors as a valuable tool to influence foreign target audiences, and leaves U.S. military forces vulnerable to enemies who have demonstrated the ability to propagate rumors with great success. The key to overcoming the obstacles posed by rumors, as well as taking advantage of the opportunities they present, begins with an understanding of the principles governing their nature.

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[226] Adrian Chen, "The Agency," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 7, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html?_r=0.

This study flowed from a review of current and historical influence doctrine, in search of informal techniques that could be used to influence foreign audiences indirectly. Military doctrine of the OSS during the 1940s included rumor theory, based on the writings of Robert Knapp. However, with the dissolution of the OSS in 1945, such tenets were not reincorporated into subsequent editions of influence doctrine, except for a brief mention in a PSYOP manual from 1994, which has subsequently been rescinded.[227] Even where rumor theory was mentioned in military doctrine, focus was given to the crafting and employment of effective rumors based on a nascent understanding of the subject. Doctrine has not discussed how the influence practitioner is to recognize and counter rumors employed by the enemy; neither has doctrine accounted for the implications of advances of technology since the 1940s.

This study synthesized previous academic and doctrinal work on the subject of rumors, and proposed a set of principles to employ and defend against rumors effectively. Specifically, effective rumors are characteristically uncomplicated and easy to remember; they are based on the current interests and circumstances of their audience; they exploit emotions and sentiments, and they follow historical precedents. Effective rumors also require the satisfaction of five criteria: plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and—in some cases—suggestiveness.

The second set of principles covered the defense against rumors, with general guidelines for a defense against rumors including being prepared to deal with rumors, taking prompt action once rumors emerge, staying on message when refuting rumors, controlling the narrative, minimizing misunderstanding when refuting rumors, and taking responsibility for the truthful elements of any rumor. Under the guidelines for defense, two sets of criteria were given for preventing and neutralizing rumors. Preventing rumors requires reducing environmental anxiety and ambiguity, while limiting an adversary's means to disseminate rumors. Neutralizing rumors requires ignoring those that are impotent, commenting on those that are plausible, confirming the truth, and refuting falsehoods effectively.

[227] U.S. Department of the Army, FM 33-1-1: Psychological Operations Techniques and Procedures, 11–4—11–5.

These sets of principles were then tested through case studies. Three case studies investigated successful rumor propagation, including a rumor that the British could set the English Channel on fire during World War II to thwart attempts at invasion; a rumor that claimed the September 11 attacks were a Zionist plot; and a rumor that discredited terrorist leader Noordin Top after his death. The study then investigated two examples of the successful defense against rumors, including the defense against a rumor that inflated the effects of polio on FDR during his 1932 campaign for the American presidency; and the successful defense of a rumor that instigated a boycott against the retailer Carrefour in China in 2008. The thesis also investigated one case of the failure to defend against rumors, specifically rumors during Operation Iraqi Freedom that claimed American forces were attempting to starve the Iraqi population into submission by killing livestock and destroying crops.

In all three cases of rumor employment, actors successfully propagated rumors by satisfying each element of the proposed five criteria (plausibility, simplicity, suitability, vividness, and suggestiveness). The rumor that the British possessed a new incendiary weapon, capable of setting surface water ablaze, was plausible to the anxiety-filled ranks of the German military. It was simple in that it contained little supplementary information about the new weapon itself. It was suitable to its purpose of sowing fear and doubt, as well as vivid, as demonstrated by its gossip-worthiness among German soldiers. Finally, it was suggestive by leaving its content and conclusion open for interpretation, allowing the rumor to adapt to changing circumstances.

The rumor a Zionist conspiracy perpetrated the September 11 attacks was plausible to Muslim and Middle Eastern audiences because it nested with the already strong prejudice of its audience against the state of Israel. It was simple in its design, allowing its audience to tailor the rumor depending on environmental needs, and was suitable to bolster anti-Semitism by exploiting the increased global fear and sense of ambiguity as a result of the attacks. Furthermore, it was vivid in its emotional provocativeness, and was suggestive of possible future catastrophes befalling its audience.

The rumor that Noordin Top was a homosexual was plausible because little was publicly known about Noordin's personal life and a trusted official of the Indonesian government provided the evidence suggesting his sexual deviancy. It was simple in that the forensic examiner's observation that Noordin had endured repeated trauma to his anal cavity could not be misconstrued or easily explained away. It was suitable to discredit Noordin by playing on the Indonesian cultural contexts of sexuality, religion, and nationality, and was vivid in its elicitation of a moral reaction to a cultural taboo against homosexuality. Finally, it was suggestive because the forensic examiner never explicitly stated his judgment on Noordin's sexual orientation; he merely provided the evidence, allowing the audience to draw its own conclusion.

The analysis of these cases supports the validation of all five criteria of rumor employment, with all the criteria being satisfied in each case. The analysis suggests that, where the proposed criteria are not satisfied, or where the criteria conflict with one another, a rumor will not become self-propelling or will become unrecognizably distorted from its original form, and thus fail to propagate effectively and influence the intended audience.

However, this initial analysis of successful rumor propagation and defense left unanswered which variables were most important, and how the variables affected one another. Future study should be given to the potential weighting of each criterion that might determine their importance and connection to one another in effective rumor propagation.

The three cases concerned with rumor defense included a mixture of the six proposed criteria for rumor prevention (reducing environmental anxiety and uncertainty, and limiting the means of rumor dissemination) and neutralization (ignoring impotent rumors, commenting on plausible rumors, confirming the truth, and refuting effectively). The politically motivated rumor targeting FDR's physical and mental health was defeated by the use of statements from authoritative and credible spokespersons to decrease the public's anxiety about FDR's health, by restricting mediums that intended to circulate the rumor, by not commenting on implausible related rumors, and by maintaining open dialogue with the public. The rumor initiated by Chinese activists to cause a boycott of

the retailer Carrefour was defeated by restricting access to Internet sites spreading the rumor, and by Carrefour's use of a credible spokesperson to refute allegations using the truth, while promoting an image of transparency through open dialogue with the Chinese public. The one case of unsuccessful defense against rumors—the failure of coalition forces to defend against a series of rumors propagated by insurgents in Iraq—demonstrated the organization's failure to employ any of the six rumor defense criteria. Coalition forces did not employ proactive measures to prevent the circulation of the insurgents' rumors. Furthermore, they did not maintain open dialogue with the local populace to explain the real cause of the drought and the purpose for the inoculation campaign. Coalition forces also did not employ reactive measures against insurgent rumors once they were identified in circulation, primarily because the rumors were thought too fantastic to be believed by the local populace. As a result of their perceptual bias, coalition forces made no effort to refute the rumors that were in fact credible to the farmers, which allowed the rumors to become entrenched in the local psyche as fact. Once ingrained, these rumors derailed an important information operations campaign in the area, and channeled more support from the populace to the insurgents.

The analysis of these cases suggests that a mixture of both proactive and reactive measures form the best defense against rumors and, thus, supports the tenuous validation of all six criteria of rumor defense. The defense against the rumor targeting FDR adequately demonstrates the satisfaction of all criteria; the defense against the rumor targeting Carrefour demonstrates the satisfaction of the criteria for neutralizing a rumor; and the failure to defend against the rumor targeting coalition forces demonstrates the results of not satisfying any of the criteria. Collectively, these cases suggest the need for an organization to conduct methodical scanning of the information environment for conditions favoring rumor generation; to act transparently, ethically, and responsibly in public; and to eliminate known sources of rumor by restricting those mediums or channels through which rumors propagate. Further, the case studies reveal the importance of considering rumors from the perspective of the target audience, taking seriously those rumors that are plausible to the target audience. Rumor defense should also address details of rumors that are true, and act quickly, because rumors left to fester are more

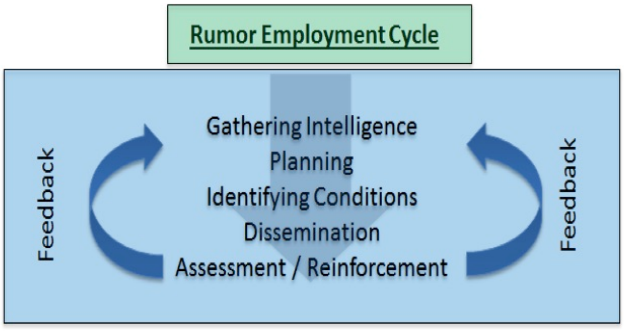
difficult to counteract once they have taken root in the psyche of the target audience. Future study should focus on further substantiating the proposed criteria, or working toward the proposition of additional criteria for rumor defense.

The study concludes by proposing two new models based on these case study findings, the rumor employment cycle and the rumor defense process. These models will help assist the influence practitioner with the employment of, and defense against, rumors in the modern security environment.

B. RUMOR EMPLOYMENT CYCLE (REC)

Influence practitioners need a clear understanding of both friendly and operational environments to create, spread, and evaluate the success of a rumor effectively. The REC can help aid influence practitioners as a planning tool that helps influencers craft, synchronize, spread, and evaluate rumors. Specifically, the REC consists of six components: gathering intelligence, planning, identifying conditions, dissemination, assessment, reinforcement, and feedback. This cycle is depicted in Figure 4. The following sections elaborate on each of the components of the REC.

Figure 4. Elements of the Rumor Employment Cycle



Intelligence plays a fundamental role in rumor employment by providing planners with foundational knowledge on potential target audiences. Intelligence needs to account for all aspects of a target audience, including their beliefs, perceptions, fears, and environmental or social factors. This intelligence is then used by planners to create a general understanding of a target audience within the context of their social and cultural

framework, while accounting for changes and potential opportunities in the operational environment. This information is also used later in the process to craft relevant and effective rumors. The more up-to-date and culturally relevant the intelligence gathered during this phase determines how smoothly subsequent phases of the process will be. Finally, intelligence needs to be constantly sought and accounted for throughout the remaining phases of the employment cycle for the rumor to be relevant.

The planning phase of the REC is critical to the success of any operation because the prospective employment of rumors must be aligned and synchronized with the overall operation at its conception. This process allows the staff and the commander to examine the probable benefits and risks of rumor employment. Furthermore, in this phase of the planning process, once the risks and opportunities are identified, the plan may incorporate elements to mitigate the risk while maximizing the likelihood that potential opportunities are exploitable in the future by setting conditions early.

During the planning phase, the rumor-planning cell begins to craft sets of rumors based on known or perceived conditions and operational goals. The planning cell also begins to research the best channels for the rumors to be disseminated and additional channels from which to gain feedback. Likewise, during this phase, the planning cell in charge of rumor creation should become integrated into the operations cell to facilitate synchronization and unity of effort across the military staff.

Once baseline intelligence is acquired, and the rumor-planning cell is incorporated into the staff and plan, the REC moves into its next phase of identifying conditions that will facilitate the spread of the rumor. Bordia and Defonzo assert that studies on rumor theory have confirmed, "that rumor susceptibility depends on whether there is an optimum combination of uncertainty and anxiety."[228] Rumors fill knowledge gaps in times of uncertainty or when people lack information on ambiguous situations.[229] For example, rumors had become pervasive in the former Soviet Union around the time of its collapse because state-run news sources were perceived to be untrustworthy,

[228] Bordia and Difonzo, "Toward a Dynamic Social Impact Theory of Rumor," 52.

[229] Ibid.

especially surrounding important events.[230] Bordia and Defonzo posit that in uncertain environments, such as those created in the former Soviet Union, "rumors are explanations that give 'structuring' or 'frame' to the ambiguous events within a context. Rumors give the events meaning and predictability, and this eases the discomfort."[231]

While uncertainty stokes a desire for information in an ambiguous situation, anxiety drives people to seek answers. Bordia and Difonzo define anxiety in this context as, "the fear that negative events will likely occur or that positive events won't occur."[232] Under these conditions, people are more likely to spread rumors, and anxiety is the strongest associated factor tied to rumor propagation.[233] With little knowledge of a situation, and the perceived fear that negative or at the very least less-than-positive outcomes will arise, people seek to control the uncertainty of the situation by listening to and spreading rumors.[234] Therefore, uncertainty and anxiety increase the planner's likelihood that a well-constructed rumor will spread across the desired target audience.

With the identification of the proper environmental conditions, planners then disseminate the rumor to the population. This process requires using different channels to ensure that the rumor takes hold and continues to spread toward its desired target. This phase is as equally a science as it is an art. Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow contend that two scientific aspects require consideration when disseminating a rumor.

> First, as cognitive psychologists have shown, repetition fosters belief. Merely hearing a tale several times increases our confidence in its veracity. Second, as a rumor circulates, it mutates into a more plausible proposition. During social interchange, rumors don't merely get relayed, they get refined according to what the transmitter believes is true.[235]

Dissemination is also an art because it is often hard to determine which individuals or groups are the most effective communicators of the rumor. To aid in this

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[230] Bordia and Difonzo, "Toward a Dynamic Social Impact Theory of Rumor," 52.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid., 53.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Bordia, Difonzo, and Rosnow, "Reigning in Rumors," 54.

aspect, dissemination techniques need to incorporate what Malcolm Gladwell describes in his book, *The Tipping Point*, as a connector. For Gladwell, a connector is a person who likes and needs to make connections with a greater number of people.[236] These connectors act as information hubs of large networks and thereby decrease the degree of separation between people.[237] By providing rumors to connectors—such as bartenders and barbers—it increases the likelihood that the rumor will be transmitted to a large portion of their personal and professional networks. In the modern digital world, bartenders and barbers may not be the most effective connectors to spread the rumor, rather connectors who have large digital footprints and networks via social media or blogs can prove more effective.

In either case of real or digital world connectors, several of Cialdini's "principles of influence" are applicable to narrowing the field of potential effective connectors. According to Cialdini, the six principles of influence (reciprocity, authority, scarcity, commitment and consistency, liking, and social proof) "produce a distinct kind of automatic, mindless compliance from people, that is, a willingness to say yes without thinking first."[238] For the purposes of rumors, these principles increase the rumor's acceptance by others when delivered by people who have the credentials of liking, social proof, or authority. The principle of liking states that, "most prefer to say yes to the requests of people we know and like."[239] Therefore, people who are liked, or followed in digital or real life, have greater influence on the people who like or are following them. Social proof is the notion that people, "view a behavior as correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it."[240] For rumors, the more connectors who adopt the rumor create a "proof" for others that the rumor is true, and thereby, exert social pressure on others to assume the same belief. The principle of authority states,

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[236] Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2000), 38–49.

[237] Ibid.

[238] Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion (Revised Edition)* (New York: Harper Business, 2006), xii.

[239] Ibid., 142.

[240] Ibid., 99.

"deference to authorities can occur in a mindless fashion as a kind of decision-making shortcut."[241] If someone is identified as an authority, people are more likely to believe what they say is fact without questioning its validity, which eases acceptance rates and furthers promulgation.

As a rumor disseminates through a population, the planning team must assess its usefulness and determine whether to reinforce it with additional information, facts, or rumors. Additional information or facts (perceived or real) can add further credibility to a rumor. Subsequent rumors can also add strength to the original rumor or create more ambiguity that the defender must suppress before restoring clarity to the situation and confidence among the population. Furthermore, during this phase planners may conclude that the rumor needs no further prompting. This conclusion may arise because the rumor is spreading virally and has gained wide acceptance, or because the rumor has failed to spread and has had limited effect on the population.

The last element to discuss in the REC is feedback. Feedback consists of the retrieval of information on the conditions of the environment and population regarding rumor promulgation and acceptance; feedback allows for the assessment of disseminated rumors, and builds understanding for the employment of future rumors. Channels that carry this information back to the planners can span the full range of intelligence sources, from the clandestine to open source. The advent of modern communications technology has only increased the channels through which real-time feedback is received. These advancements allow planners to assess the progress and effectiveness of rumors more accurately. The key aspect to feedback is that it is continually sought, and adjusted for, throughout the REC.

C. RUMOR DEFENSE PROCESS (RDP)

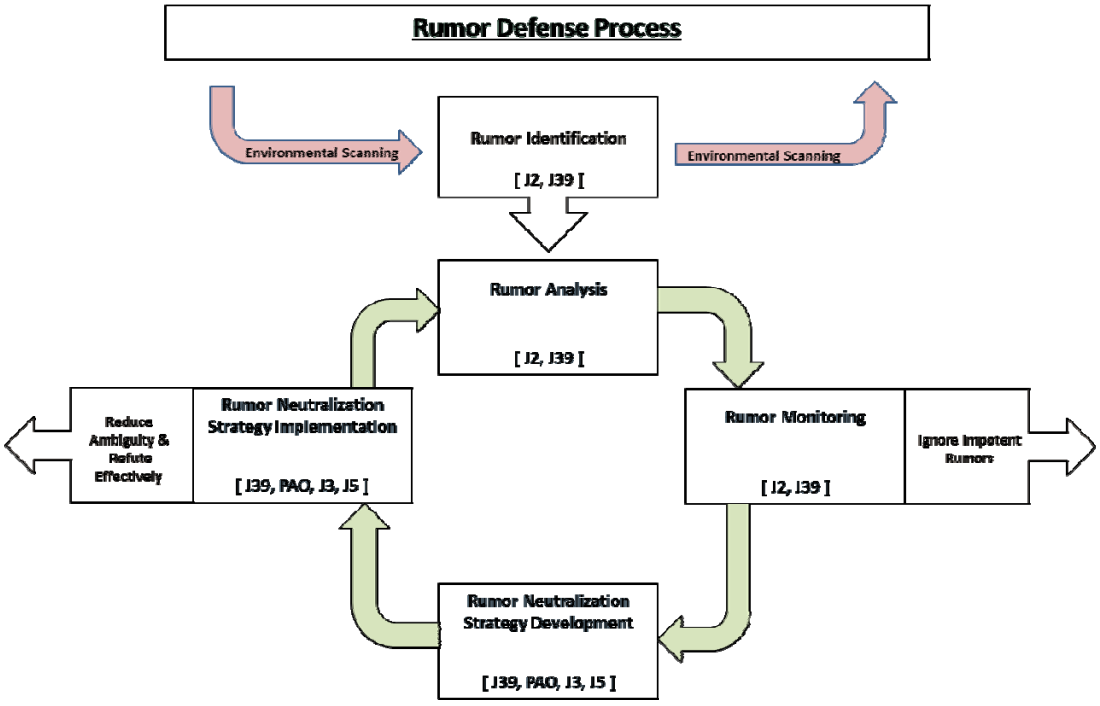
As has been demonstrated through the case studies in the previous chapters, it is decidedly more difficult to defend against rumors than to employ them effectively. To prepare a defense against rumors successfully, encompassing prevention and neutralization, a coordinated effort across a joint military staff is required. Although the

[241] Cialdini, *Influence*, 196.

preponderance of the responsibility for identifying rumors and assessing their potential impact lies with members of the J2 (intelligence) and the J39 (information operations) sections, input to the planning and support for the execution of a rumor prevention or neutralization plan is required by the J3 (operational planning), J5 (future operational planning), and the PAO (public affairs office) sections to be effective.

To help coordinate efforts for the defense against rumors, this study proposes adherence to the RDP depicted in Figure 5, which is loosely based on a reputation and strategic management model proposed by public relations expert John Dalton.[242] Beginning with the identification of rumors present in the environment, the RDP follows a progression of four stages to neutralize their effect against the organization: analysis, monitoring, strategy development, and strategy implementation. The following sections discuss the RDP is greater detail.

Figure 5. The Rumor Defense Process



[242] John Dalton, "Reputation and Strategic Issue Management," in *Reputation Management: Building and Protecting Your Company's Profile in a Digital World*, ed. Andrew Hiles (London: A&C Black, 2011), 208.

The RDP begins by identifying key conditions in the external environment that favor rumor generation. This process requires the active collection of data and information by scanning the environment. Although the J2 is already engaged in the process of collecting information, input from the J39 is required to help focus collection efforts on the presence of conditions giving rise to rumors among a population. Collection efforts should focus particularly on the introduction of events that increase uncertainty and ambiguity in the environment, which an adversary might use to advance a rumor. Events that an adversary could take advantage of include significant changes in the political, economic, social, environmental, or legal structures affecting a population, which could be attributed back to the military organization.[243]

Furthermore, information collection efforts, specifically focusing on the generation of rumors, should look to a range of formal and informal sources to include, but not limited to: newspapers; social media and networks; online communities; government statements; research publications; religious proclamations; social conversations at restaurants, bars and shops; protest group slogans; labor union minutes; university campus conversations; human intelligence sources; conversations with host nation politico-military leaders; and the publications of non-governmental organizations. This focused scanning of the environment will help the J2 and J39 to identify rumors in their nascency.

Once a rumor has been identified, the first stage of the RDP centers on rumor analysis by the J2 and J39. This stage establishes the facts and premises upon which the rumor is based, and examines the potential impact of the rumor. Rumors should be analyzed with regard to their relevance to the population, the frequency of their mention, the diversity of mediums used to propagate them, and their source, if the source can be ascertained. Such an analysis helps to project an anticipated life cycle of the rumor, ranging from its emergence to resolution. The rumor analysis stage concludes with a forecasting of the rumor's potential reach and impact.

[243] Dalton, "Reputation and Strategic Issue Management," 209.

After analysis, the next stage of the RDP is monitoring of the rumor. This stage requires continued environmental scanning by the J2 and J39 to determine any change in the intensity of the rumor's propagation, to note any modifications to the rumor since its analysis, and to determine whether the rumor is being interwoven with any others, giving it a greater impact potential. The purpose of this stage is to track the life cycle of the rumor to determine whether it is gaining traction with a population, and if so, to determine what the impact of the rumor would have on the organization if left unchecked. Those rumors that appear to be impotent should be allowed to resolve themselves without interference by the organization, as simply acknowledging the rumor may give it greater credibility than it would have otherwise had. Rumors that appear to be gaining traction, or have the potential for the greatest impact, should be countered before they become a crisis for the government, military or organization.

The next stage of the RDP, the development of a neutralization strategy for potentially impactful rumors, requires input from, and coordination between, the J39, PAO, J3, and J5. During this stage, members of the operational staff determine how to respond to the rumor based upon environmental restrictions and resource constraints. With the assistance of the PAO, J3 and J5, the J39 crafts an information campaign to counter the rumor, while identifying the potential impact of current or future operations on the reach and impact of the rumor. The information campaign should take advantage of the mediums and informal channels through which the rumor was originally observed; it should also take advantage of the formal channels specifically available to the organization. The key element of the defensive campaign is consistency and reinforcement of the counter-message to the rumor; this process should be based upon truth, lest an organization risk its overall credibility by being caught in a lie. Preparing the information campaign should also include brainstorming a list of questions relating to the rumor that may be posited by the public, and a corresponding list of answers to those questions.

The final stage of the RDP is to implement the neutralization strategy for the rumor. This stage involves active measures taken by the organization to counter the rumor. The J39 and PAO would jointly implement an information campaign with the aim

of reducing environmental ambiguity and uncertainty, thus eroding utility of the rumor for the population. The information campaign could encompass the following: articles in local newspapers; responses across social media; radio and television broadcasts; the use of local indigenous spokespersons; open dialogue with the population by hosting town hall meetings; and press conferences that feature a credible spokesperson from the organization. After implementing the information campaign, the J39 and J2 would continue monitoring the rumor to determine whether it was quelled by the countermeasures enacted.

D. CONCLUSION

Although the PSYOP soldier is charged with countering influence operations employed by the enemy, and to be an expert at influencing foreign target audiences themselves, doctrine currently does not provide knowledge on how to recognize, counter, or effectively craft rumors for offensive purposes. By failing to include the tenets of rumor theory into current doctrine and training, influence practitioners have not been given the required base knowledge to carry out their duties effectively. Therefore, the overall objective of this study explored the military application of rumor theory to determine which principles and concepts governing the spread of rumors should be incorporated into the future doctrine and training of PSYOP forces. By incorporating the principles and concepts of rumor employment and defense discussed in this study into future doctrine and training, PSYOP forces will be better suited to influence foreign target audiences, and at the same time, be better prepared to counter an adversary's attempts to do the same.

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